



**Community Food
Assessment for
Hastings and Prince
Edward Counties**

Acknowledgements

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1.0 Executive Summary

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) initiated this project to conduct a Community Food Assessment (CFA) that spans both Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (HPEC). The need for a CFA was identified by HPEPH with the goal of engaging with community stakeholders and residents to better understand the challenges and opportunities for improving the accessibility, affordability, availability, and adequacy of nutritious foods in HPEC. Ultimately, HPEPH aims to gain a better understanding of how they can support key partners in their efforts to reduce food insecurity and improve the consumption of fresh and nutritious foods in the community, as well as to determine strategic actions that HPEPH can implement to achieve this.

Combined, this project engaged over 220 community members throughout HPEC. Through a series of community engagement activities including interviews, a workshop, and an online survey, a number of key themes emerged. First, it became evident that HPEPH is positioned to be a strong advocate for driving food systems change. Second, HPEPH was identified as a strong communicator within the food system, and there are a number of opportunities for continued and enhanced communications to support access to nutritious foods. Finally, it became clear that there is a timely opportunity for HPEPH to support food access programs in shifting towards self-sustaining models.

The recommendations resulting from this work are focused on activities that HPEPH can implement to enact change. They are, however, collaborative in nature and will draw upon the strength of networks within HPEC. Recommendations include activities that can support ongoing initiatives, enhancing current program offerings, and maintaining the momentum from this project to continue to improve access to nutritious foods in Hastings and Prince Edward communities.



2.0 Introduction and Goals

In the summer of 2019, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) initiated this project to conduct a Community Food Assessment (CFA) that spans both Hastings and Prince Edward Counties. HPEPH identified the need for a CFA with the goal of engaging with community stakeholders and residents to better understand the challenges and opportunities for improving the accessibility, affordability, availability and adequacy of nutritious foods in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties.

Community Food Security is a strategy for ensuring secure access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for everyone, produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity.¹

The purpose of a Community Food Assessment (CFA) is to understand the community food system and identify local opportunities for change that enhance community food security. A CFA identifies community-level assets, resources, policies, and programs. The purpose of this report is to provide direction to HPEPH in enhancing healthy community food environments and in supporting healthy food systems, both of which are critical in promoting healthier communities. Ultimately, this project will inform strategies and recommendations to work towards improving the consumption of nutritious foods in HPEC.

A CFA is a useful tool because it is solutions-oriented and considers the problems that exist, as well as the assets and resources that are already in place.² This project was collaborative in nature. The insights from key community members within the food system informed the recommendations in this report to create real and lasting impact.

The goal of this report is to:

- provide a better understanding of how HPEPH can support key partners in their efforts to reduce food insecurity and improve the consumption of fresh and nutritious foods in our communities, and
- determine strategic actions that HPEPH can implement to support key partners.

3.0 Methods

Community engagement plays a key role in understanding the food system and determining ways in which HPEPH can enact change. As such, the methods for this project focused on interacting with key stakeholders and the general public in HPEC.

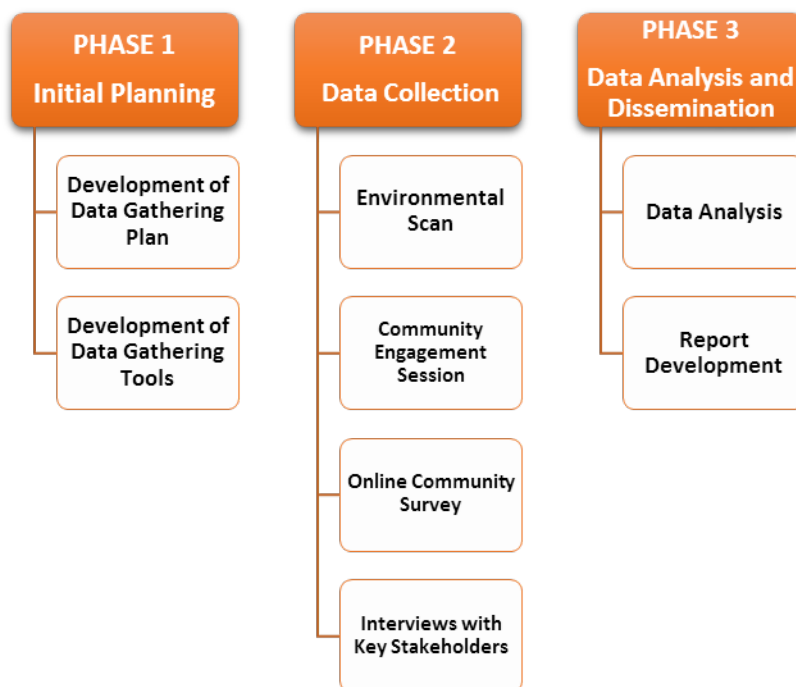


Figure 1. Overview of the project process.

3.1 Project Process

Initial Planning

First, HPEPH convened an Advisory Committee to support the direction for this project. The Working Group includes members from HPEPH, The County Foundation, Harvest Hastings, and the Community Development Council of Quinte. The Group met four times over the course of this project. The purpose of the Working Group was to provide input and guidance to the project process and support with identifying next steps for implementation. Initial planning helped determine the best approach for engaging stakeholders in HPEC as well as gathering key data about the food system.

Environmental Scan

Second, an environmental scan was conducted to summarize the data available on the food system in the region. Six sectors were identified to structure the synthesis of the environmental scan information.

1. Food production
2. Food access and consumption
3. Food manufacturing/processing/distribution
4. Food surplus and disposal
5. Food procurement/purchasing/intermediaries
6. Food policy and governance

It is important to note that a community food system is inherently complex and intertwined and is not a linear value chain. Topics discussed in the environmental scan included but were not limited to local agriculture, food procurement and purchasing in municipal institutions, food access and consumption, and food policy and governance.ⁱ

Findings from the environmental scan identified potential focus areas that were used to develop the questions for the Community Engagement Session and Community Survey, as well as the list of stakeholders for the Key Informant Interviews. The focus areas included the following:

- Investigate community members' use and satisfaction with various programs and services that contribute to food access, affordability, and food literacy,
- Connect with farm producers and the agriculture community to identify ways HPEPH can support them in promoting community food security, and
- Engage with procurement staff at public institutions (e.g. school boards, hospitals, community centres) to determine if there are any existing healthy and/or local food procurement policies in place and how HPEPH can support them in promoting healthy food environments.

Community Engagement Session

Following the environmental scan, a community engagement session was held in Prince Edward County in collaboration with the Prince Edward Learning Centre (PELC). Invitations for the session were widely distributed by PELC and the Food Collective (a Collective Impact Project of the County Foundation). There were 17 community members at the engagement session, including students, youth, farmers, local organizations, and other people actively involved in the Prince Edward County

ⁱ For a copy of the environmental scan, please contact Hastings Prince Edward Public Health.

community. The main goal of this session was to gather information on challenges, successes, and opportunities for the future of the food system in Prince Edward County. During this session, the group participated in a S.O.A.R. (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) activity.

Community Survey

A public survey was conducted with residents in Hastings County including the City of Belleville and the City of Quinte West. The survey was available from November 25, 2019 to January 13, 2020. The survey was promoted through HPEPH social media channels, and community partners were contacted via e-mail. All libraries and municipal offices in Hastings County’s lower-tier municipalities and the cities of Belleville and Quinte West were contacted and encouraged to share the survey with their community. CDC Quinte also shared the survey with their community partners and encouraged them to share within their networks. Additionally, information about the survey was included in a local newspaper article.ⁱⁱ In total, there were 180 respondents from various parts of Hastings County who completed the survey.ⁱⁱⁱ

Key Informant Interviews

One-on-one interviews were conducted with 22 stakeholders from HPEC. Stakeholders were identified by HPEPH, the project Advisory Committee, and the project team (Wilton Group and Pratley Consulting). Stakeholders interviewed included not-for-profit organizations (such as food banks, community groups, and others), health care institutions (such as long-term care facilities), school board representatives (including school board staff and those who support food procurement within local schools), and government stakeholders (including Ontario Works staff, policy and planning staff, and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs).

Table 1. Key informant interviews by stakeholder group.

Stakeholder	Number of Interviewees
Not-for-Profit Groups	7
Health care Institutions	3
School Board Representatives	3
Government Representatives	9

ⁱⁱ Thank you to the Quinte West Public Library, Hastings Highlands Public Library, Marmora and Lake Public Library, Stirling-Rawdon Public Library, North Hastings Children’s Services, Municipality of Centre Hastings, Town of Deseronto, Madoc Township, Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre, Community Care for South Hastings, and any other partners we are unaware of, who promoted the survey.

ⁱⁱⁱ There were 193 respondents in total. Those who were deemed under-age (18 years or younger) were screened out. In addition, respondents from Prince Edward County were also screened out because another food-related survey was already being distributed in PEC. In total, 13 respondents were screened out through this process.

3.2 Limitations

Data Collection

The key findings and associated recommendations are a combined result of the community engagement that took place across HPEC. However, due to time constraints and the scope of this project, the data collection did not include research into the geographic distribution of food in the region.^{iv} The results of this project provide preliminary findings that could inform future research tied to specific HPEPH projects.

Food System Sectors

Due to time constraints and the scope of this project, it did not include all the sectors involved in the food system. This project engaged community organizations and not-for-profits providing food services, residents within HPEC, agricultural organizations, policy makers, local school boards, and local institutions (*i.e.*, hospitals). Food system stakeholders that were not engaged in this project that may warrant future engagement include food processors/manufacturers, food waste systems staff, and retailers.

Community Survey

Because of the methods used to distribute the survey, the responses that were received are considered a convenience sample of the population of Hastings County.^v This means that the survey may not have reached the range of residents needed to provide insight into all residents in Hastings County. For this reason, the results from the community survey cannot be used to draw conclusions about the population in general in Hastings County. However, the results from the survey can be used as a starting point to inform further research tied to specific initiatives and projects. This should be considered when reading section 4.1 *Survey Findings*. Future research and intervention planning should seek support from community stakeholders to expand the scope and depth of the resident engagement process.

^{iv} Examples of established population-level indicators to monitor food environments include the density of food outlets; the relative density of food outlets where low nutrient dense food is usually offered; and the proximity of the population living in specific geographic areas to food outlets.

^v Respondents from Prince Edward County were not included in the community survey because another food-related survey was already being distributed in PEC.

4.0 Key Findings and Recommendations

Through community engagement, three key themes emerged. The key themes are summarized below. The recommendations detailed in section 4.3 are grouped under these key themes.

1) **ADVOCACY**

Given its neutral voice, HPEPH is positioned to be a strong advocate for driving food systems change because it is a trusted organization, makes evidence-based decisions, and has a voice at the table in key decision-making places.

2) **COMMUNICATION**

HPEPH has been identified as a strong communicator within the food system. Three key areas of focus for HPEPH were identified.

Communication with the public: The strong connection to the public serves as an opportunity to drive conversations about food, nutrition and the programs that support healthy communities.

Communications for food system stakeholders: HPEPH plays a key role in many of the programs that support access to healthy food. Public Health expertise in areas such as food safety, regulations, and best practices is an asset.

Communication between the food system stakeholders: The mandate of HPEPH enables connections between a diverse group of stakeholders. There is an opportunity for Public Health to leverage its network to drive change within the food system.

3) **SHIFTING TO SELF-SUSTAINING MODELS**

While HPEC have a variety of impactful food supports provided by community-based organizations, there is a general reliance on a shrinking volunteer base and limited resources. There is a timely opportunity for food access programs to shift to self-sustaining business models (*i.e.*, cooperatives, social enterprise models). There is also an opportunity to support initiatives that focus on expanding the growing season in HPEC to contribute to a stronger local food economy. HPEPH can play a key support role in these conversations, especially in communicating a “call-to-action.”

4.1 Survey Findings

Who Responded to the Survey?

The survey reached community members in all of the municipalities and city-centres in Hastings County. The majority of respondents were from (in decreasing order) Belleville, Quinte West, Deseronto and Tweed (Figure 2).

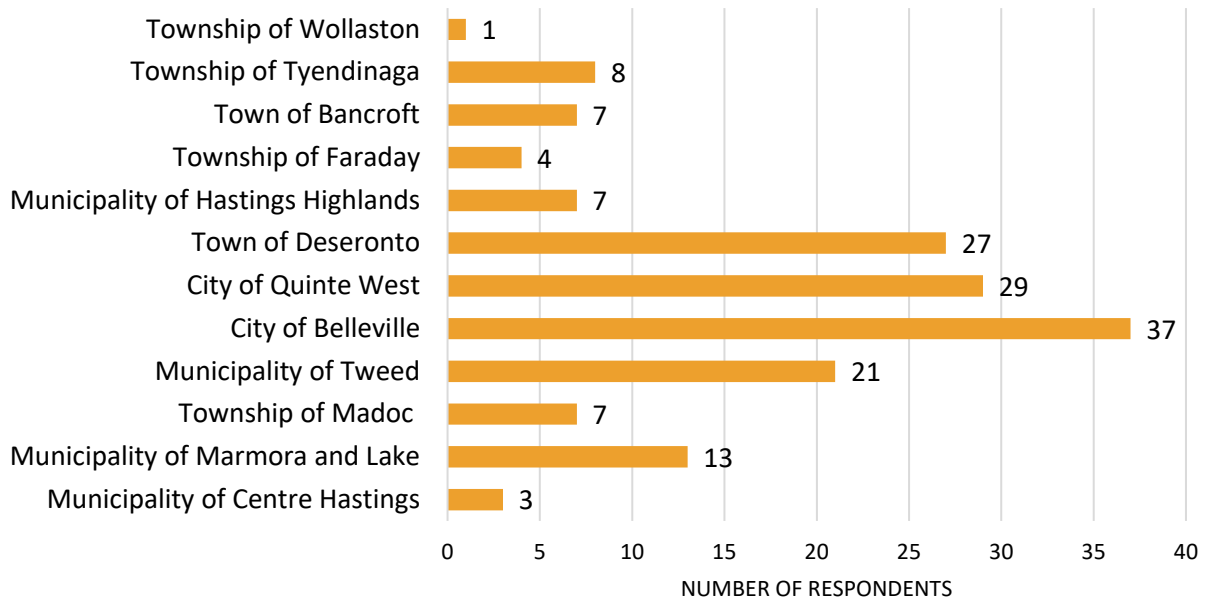


Figure 2. Number of respondents by the municipality (or City) they live in

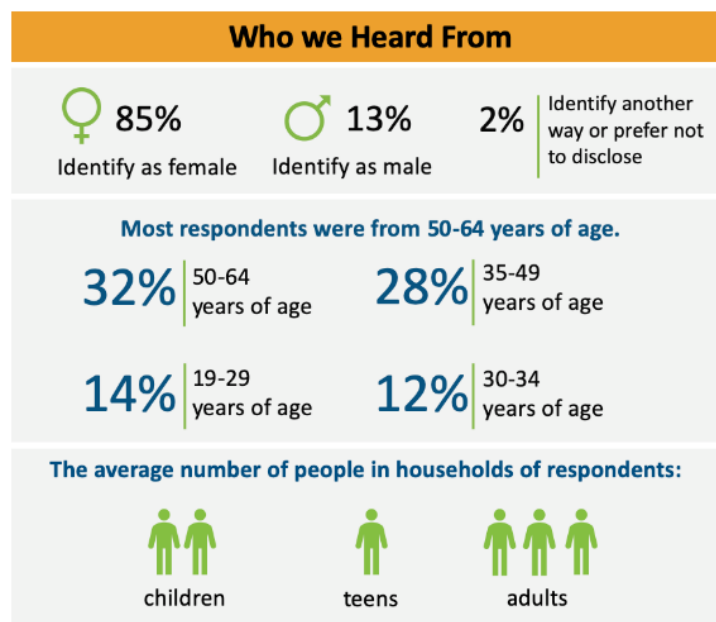


Figure 3. Summary of respondent demographics including gender, age, and household size

To help with interpretation of results, the survey also included questions to screen for food insecurity. The questions used were from the Hunger Vital Sign™ screening tool.³

Respondents were asked to comment on whether in the past 12 months, they had worried about running out of food before having money to buy more; and whether in the past 12 months, the food they bought just didn't last and they didn't have money to buy more. Responses indicate that 38% of respondents are at risk for food insecurity.^{vi}



Figure 4. Circular graph showing 38%

Just over one third of respondents are at risk for food insecurity

Accessing Food

The largest group of participants noted that they shopped at grocery stores weekly (47%), with many shopping at grocery stores more than once a week (34%). A few participants noted that they shopped at convenience stores weekly (9%), but most shopped at these places either occasionally (38%) or never (38%). Most respondents only shopped at farm stands and farmers' markets and local butcher/fish markets occasionally (64%). In terms of the Good Food Box program, 10% of respondents indicated using this program monthly, and 20% occasionally.

Nine percent of respondents noted that they obtained food from a food bank, with 4% responding that they access a food bank on a regular basis and 5% accessing them occasionally. The majority of respondents (91%) "never" go to food banks, but as discussed in *Challenges in the Community* (below), there are a number of respondents who are concerned about running out of food before having the money to buy more at the end of every month. This suggests that survey respondents may be experiencing challenges accessing food, but do not use the food banks.

Respondents retrieve food from community organizations very infrequently, and most (92%) had never retrieved food from programs offered by community organizations (for example, Meals on Wheels, local church events). Participants did not frequently get their food from recreation spaces, with 26% responding occasionally, and 69% never. Additionally, a few respondents noted that they often got food from their family garden/farm.

^{vi} Due to the sensitive nature of these questions, they were put at the end of the survey and thus not all survey respondents answered this question. Out of 180 survey respondents, 156 respondents answered this question. However, this response rate is similar to the response rate of some of the questions mid-way through the survey.

Finding Healthy Food Options

In general, respondents noted that it was easiest to find healthy food^{vii} options at grocery stores, farm stands/farmers' markets, butchers/fish mongers, and by using the Good Food Box program. Respondents for whom it was applicable noted that it was generally difficult to find healthy options at food banks and community organizations, and particularly so for convenience stores. Of course, one of the limitations of this question is that it was based on the respondent's personal definition of healthy food, but this still provides a general picture of where people believe healthy food is easiest to access.

When asked, "*Where do you go to find information about food and nutrition?*" respondents said:

- Google: 26%
- Family & Relatives: 16%
- Books or Magazines: 14%
- Websites or Blogs: 13%
- Friends: 13%
- Public Health: 8%
- Doctor or Health Professional: 7%
- I don't look for this information: 3%

Among those for whom it was applicable, the majority of respondents noted that if their children were getting food on their own, they would most likely get it from a sit-down or fast-food restaurant (13%) or from a student nutrition program at school (13%), followed by from the school cafeteria (8%) or a nearby convenience store (8%). Of these four most popular sources, respondents note that the school nutrition programs are the easiest from which to get healthy and nutritious options. For the other three options, the majority of respondents find that it is a bit difficult for their children to find healthy and nutritious options.

Deciding Where to Purchase Food

Price was overwhelmingly the most important factor that influenced participants decisions related to where to shop. The second most important factor was the quality of the food. In deciding where to shop, one-stop shopping and knowing where food comes from were the two least important factors, respectively. The most frequent comment was that sales, prices, and deals are very influential on where people shop, with some noting that they will drive further to go to a store

^{vii} In the professional opinion of dietitians at HPEPH, use of the word "healthy" to describe food is an imprecise term which can be misleading. Some foods are nutrient-dense, and others are nutrient poor. For this reason, the dietitians at HPEPH try to use the term nutritious food instead of describing food as healthy or unhealthy. However, during the development of the survey, it was determined that "nutritious" may not be as well-understood as "healthy" and thus the term *healthy food* was used in the community survey. The survey results are reported using the language as it appears in the survey including use of the term *healthy food*.

with better sales, and others stating that they wish that budget did not affect their decisions as much because they would make different decisions related to “local food,” “organic products,” and other factors. Many respondents also noted that the freshness and quality of products such as meat is not great at their grocery stores, but it is either the only option or the cheapest option.

“Budget impacts my decisions more than I would like it to. If unlimited, I would buy as much local, organic, and fair trade as I could get.”

-Survey Respondent

Getting to Food Sources

Most respondents (87%) drive themselves or have a friend or family member drive them (7%) to get their food. The majority of respondents (37%) have to travel greater than 20 minutes to buy food, with 16% of respondents indicating they have to travel 30 minutes or greater. Of those who travel greater than 20 minutes to get their food, the majority are from the municipality of Tweed (15), Stirling-Rawdon (7), Tyendinaga (7), or Marmora and Lake (6). These responses indicate that accessing food for many respondents requires both access to a vehicle and a significant time investment. The findings were expected because of the rural nature of parts of Hastings County. Future research on food deserts (including rural food deserts) and food quality and pricing in rural parts of Hastings County may be warranted to understand the extent of food access challenges related to transportation and distance.

“Grocery store options where I live are extremely limited and for the most part, are very poor quality, especially with regard to the fresh produce.”

-Survey Respondent

Buying Local

Many respondents are interested in supporting local options but there are barriers. The most significant factors that discourage respondents from buying local food are seasonal availability and price. Many respondents also noted that it was difficult to find local food where they shopped. Some reasons cited for not shopping local include the lack of advertising of local options, and the lack of knowledge of what products are locally sourced.

Awareness of Community Food Services

Among respondents, the most well-known community food services in HPEC were food box programs, emergency food services, meal programs, and community gardens; while other services, such as collective kitchens, are less well-known (Figure 4). This survey question measured awareness of, but not necessarily use of, these programs.

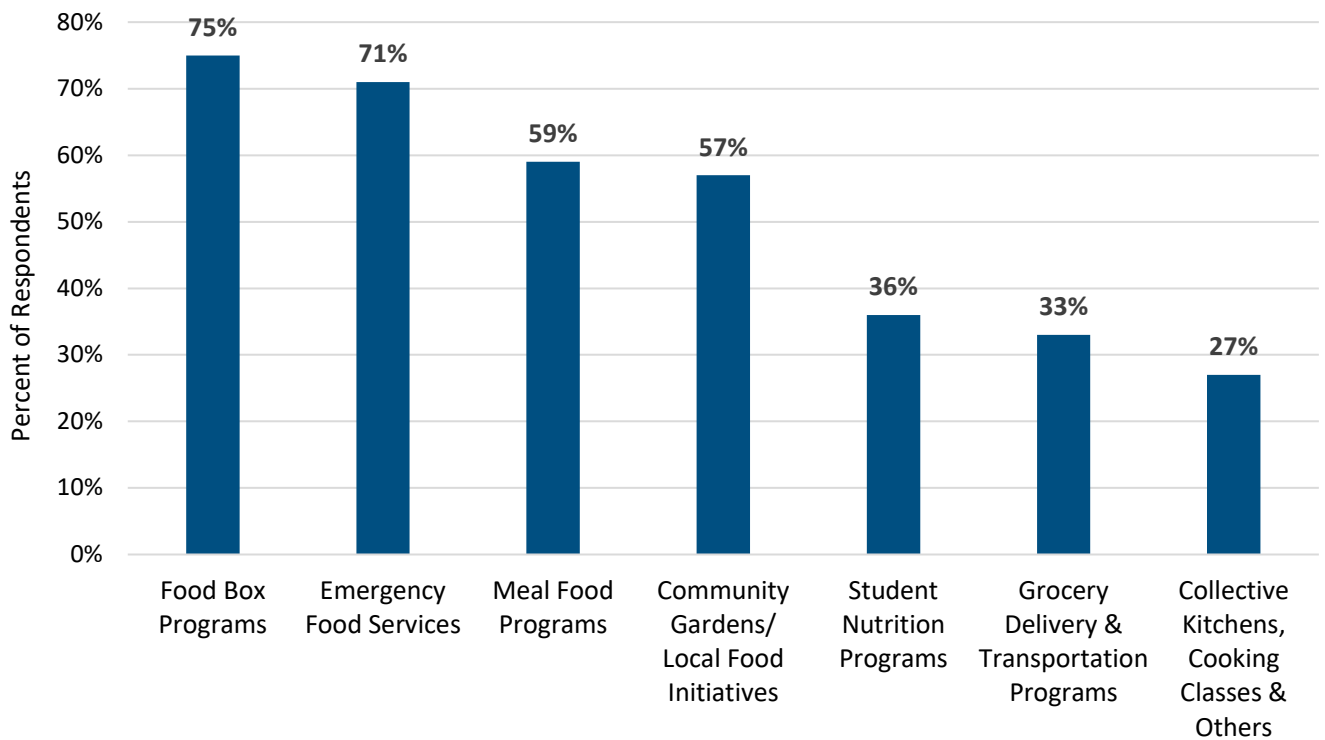


Figure 5. Community food services known to survey respondents (n=121).

When asked why the respondents think people do not use the services that are available, the majority of respondents believed that people do not feel comfortable using them. Some respondents further expanded on this idea, saying that there is a perceived stigma associated with using these services, or that there will be a loss of pride if they use them. Other common reasons cited are a lack of knowledge about the services themselves and a lack of eligibility to use them. Some comments also included that the quality and/or quantity of the food in these spaces is not adequate.

Top 6 Topics That Survey Respondents Would Like to Learn More About



Tips for grocery shopping on a budget



Information about nutrition and cooking



Subsidized Community Supported Agriculture/food boxes^{viii}



Information about gardening



Free/low cost cooking classes and recipe ideas



One stop application for all food assistance programs

Opportunities for Change

Respondents had many ideas about improving the state of food and nutrition in the region, and many are clearly very passionate about this topic. Respondents emphasized the need to provide information and education about how to make healthy choices and recipes on a budget and with limited time, as well as cooking classes that are practical (with cheap, accessible ingredients, seasonal produce, for the whole family, etc.). For example, some respondents suggested providing these classes in partnership with schools because they are a more accessible option, they provide an opportunity to involve children in cooking and nutrition, and teachers are often aware of who is in need. Respondents felt that these types of education classes should be held in accessible locations, and at times that people can attend (*e.g.*, in the evening).

For those who use food access programs, respondents expressed a desire to shift from purchasing the types of food that will last for the duration of their food budget (including canned and other processed options) to eating fresh food. For example, those with a very limited food budget may choose to purchase foods that have a longer shelf-life such as pastas and canned soups, which may not contain all the necessary nutrients required for a nutritious diet (please also see section 4.2).

^{viii} Current Community Supported Agriculture programs in Hastings County are not subsidised, but this may be a future opportunity.

Residents want access to healthy, fresh food at cheaper prices, in locations where these resources are often unavailable. For example, residents noted that they would like to see more community gardens, as there are currently few in the area. Other suggestions included selling close-to-expiration grocery store items at heavily discounted prices and teaching residents how to prepare and store food to last (through freezing, canning, etc.). Respondents would like access to local food year-round and would like food outlets (including food banks) to have more local food options. Several also noted that they would be interested in learning about and contributing to conversations about agri-food issues more regularly.

Respondents also expressed interest in a one-stop application process for all food assistance programs and supports. A summary of all the programs available to residents and that could be distributed to everyone in the community was also suggested. This could be provided in a widely accessible format and should include offline options, such as mail flyers. Some respondents expressed a desire for more information about how to contribute and help those in need.

“I’m on disability so ‘healthy’ doesn’t exist in my shopping list...‘has to last for a whole month’ is my motto.”

-Survey Respondent

Finally, participants expressed a desire for programming that is oriented towards those who are on any form of social assistance (e.g. ODSP, Ontario Works), including information on how to shop for healthy food when on social assistance. This is slightly different than simply shopping on a budget, due to added financial limitations, and is worthy of particular attention.



Challenges in the Community

Decisions about healthy eating are influenced by many aspects of our social and physical environments. Nutritional risk factors for chronic diseases and conditions are often described as “modifiable” risk factors (e.g. low intakes of vegetables and fruit). However, many people are not able to make changes to their diet because their social and physical environments or life circumstances do not support them in finding, buying, and preparing nutritious foods.⁴ Thus, it is important to consider other issues related to the food environment and to life circumstances when promoting healthy eating. The majority of respondents believe that the rising cost of living, lack of affordable housing, and limited full-time jobs are the most pressing issues in their communities (Figure 5). These issues are all important to consider in the context of access to nutritious food because they are related to income insecurity. It is interesting to note that access to nutritious, affordable food was ranked below the three most pressing issues mentioned. Other common responses in the open-ended response section included lack of public transportation and mental health issues (including addiction).

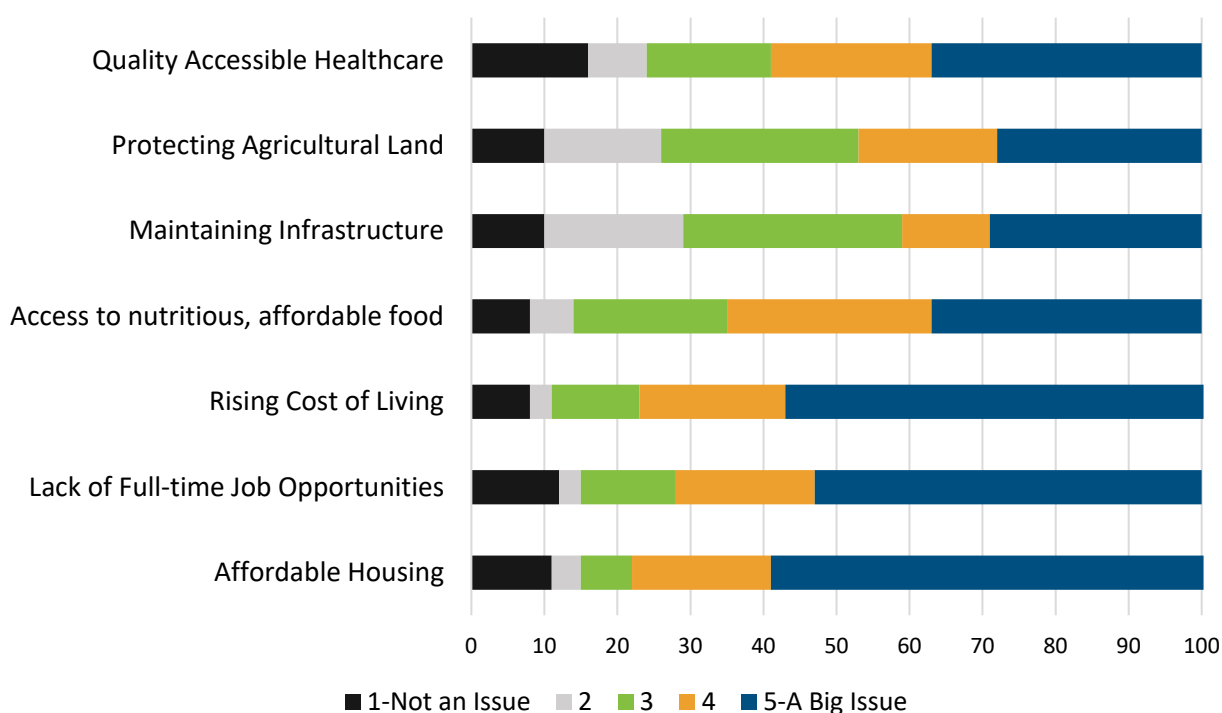


Figure 6. Survey responses for the top challenges in Hastings County. Respondents were asked to rank these challenges on a scale of 1 (black) to 5 (blue). A rank of 1 represents a challenge that is not an issue, and a rank of 5 represents a challenge that is a big issue for respondents.

4.2 Interview and Community Engagement Session Insights

Community Groups are Strong

One of the key insights from interviewees was that the relationships between like-minded community groups in HPEC are quite strong. Established food access programs such as, North Hastings Community Trust (a community-based agency addressing the impacts of poverty and injustice in North Hastings), and Food for Learning (school food program in HPEC), are noted as key assets in the region. Despite the strength of these programs, communication between these groups was highlighted as an area that could be improved.

Food Security a Key Challenge – Especially in the North

It is apparent that food insecurity is very prevalent in Hastings County, particularly in North Hastings and Centre Hastings. A key barrier to accessing food for the most vulnerable populations is access to public transportation. The lack of access to transportation is pronounced for residents in North Hastings and in particular, seniors and young families.

“People have to take taxis into Belleville in order to get access to good food, if you have a baby the taxi has to have a car seat. That is a huge issue when it comes to food security in some of the northern communities”.

– Interviewee

Interviewees noted concern over the way food bank clients have been treated in the recent past. Some interviewees reflected on stories from clients where they were unable to locate the documentation required to indicate the need to use a particular food bank. Interviewees expressed concern over the dependence on a small core group of volunteers for many food programs, particularly food banks. In addition, there appears to be a gap in the hours of many of the food access programs in both counties. For example, many food banks are only open for a limited number of hours per week, making it difficult for some individuals to access them. These limited hours can act as additional barriers for individuals who may be employed but still facing food insecurity due to low wages and/or precarious employment. These individuals are often not able to get to any of the food support programs during their regular hours of operation. There was concern about the precariousness of food banks, both in terms of dependence on limited staff/volunteers to keep them open, and on the limits to the financial resources of these food banks. Interviewees noted that if these key sources of food access for individuals living in poverty closed, there would be no stop-gap or longer-term plans to meet their needs.

“When someone says they are hungry, we shouldn’t need to question them. We just need to feed them”.

– Interviewee

The Tourism Sector as Both a Challenge and an Opportunity

A number of interviewees mentioned that the tourism sector supports the local economies throughout both HPEC. However, many of the area's assets are seasonal in nature. For example, interviewees noted that there were some negative implications associated with the growth of Prince Edward County's viticulture industry. Among these potential implications include loss of farmland to an industry that prioritizes growing grapes for the purpose of wine production over crops targeted for local food markets. Conversely, tourism in both locations was identified as an opportunity, and could be leveraged to support food access programs throughout HPEC.

Opportunities to Support Local Food

Interviewees noted that there are opportunities to enhance the local food economy in HPEC. In particular, there may be opportunities to connect local food suppliers with food access programs. Some interviewees noted that challenges with procuring local food for food access programs include:

- Limited cold storage and distribution capacity (especially in Hastings County).
- Food access programs aren't always able to ensure orders for set volumes of local food, particularly produce.
- Some food access programs work with distributors who purchase food. Distributors will sometimes try to buy local food, but this can be a challenge in the off-season and when prices of local food fluctuate.

Interviewees noted that Harvest Hastings recently released its *Future of Farming* report, and there are opportunities for HPEPH to support the agricultural sector through a public health lens.

Regulatory Challenges

Many interviewees noted the opportunity for HPEPH to advise food access stakeholders on navigating regulatory changes. For example, interviewees noted it was unclear whether they may be exempt as a Food Service Premise under On. Reg. 493/17, Section 2(2)(b). Interviewees noted that HPEPH would be well positioned to help clarify some of these challenges and communicate what these regulations may mean for programs such as student nutrition programs, local community kitchens, etc. Continued engagement with food program leaders on these matters would support the capacity for organizations to continue to provide nutritious food for HPEC residents.

Some interviewees noted that HPEPH is seen as being in a regulatory role first and foremost, and as a partner in promoting access to nutritious foods second. By offering support on regulatory

changes, there is an opportunity for HPEPH to strengthen its ability to support organizations that promote access to nutritious foods.

Student Nutrition Programs are Essential

The importance of student nutrition programs also emerged as a key theme. Interviewees expressed concern that schools may fall under the “Food Service Premise” definition of the new regulation (see *Regulatory Challenges*). Interviewees noted that if this is the case, they may be limited in their capacity to prepare fresh nutritious foods on school properties. This is particularly alarming for the more rural schools in Hastings County that are already experiencing challenges with aging infrastructure and students that are travelling off school property to purchase food. Many interviewees noted that the presence of student nutrition programs is critical in providing students with nutritious food to support their learning.

“Food provides a social element for human connection. If we offer a meal, this can be a gentle entry way into having a conversation (about academics, personal life, etc.) for our staff.”

– Terri Slack, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

Interviewees also noted that HPEPH can play a key role in communicating the importance of student nutrition programs, to educate the community about the critical role they play. This includes efforts to shift the understanding of school nutrition programs from charitable programs to community building programs. This may in turn support efforts to gather funding donations and recruit potential volunteers for these programs.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 Advocacy

- A. Continue to advocate for community gardens as a way to foster community participation in local food projects and to build healthy communities. HPEPH may support activities to advocate for community gardens, such as letters of support for grant applications of local community gardens partners, and providing written or verbal support for municipal policies that support development of community gardens.
- B. Consider incorporating planning policy review into HPEPH priorities. Providing a public health lens to planning reviews helps communities understand how the built-environment impacts access to healthy food (among other public health priorities). See Public Health Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph reports for [Wellington, Dufferin](#) and [City of Guelph](#) on *Planning Review Through a Public Health Lens* as examples.
- C. Continue to participate in networks and committees that connect to food access (*i.e.*, the Poverty Roundtable).
- D. Explore the opportunity to support future collaborative research on food deserts (including rural food deserts) and food quality and pricing in rural parts of Hastings County to understand the extent of food access challenges related to transportation and distance.

5.2 Communication

Communication with the Public

- A. Change the conversation around school nutrition programs from “poverty-driven” to nutrition-driven. Consider a communications campaign targeting young families and the public, focused on the benefits of school nutrition programs. Promotional materials may also be beneficial for school nutrition programs, to solicit donations.
- B. Support CDC Quinte in advertising the dates, locations and offerings of the Good Food Markets.
- C. Explore the opportunity to identify priority populations to provide resources to improve food literacy skills (e.g. those who are on any form of social assistance). The focus for these resources should be on shopping when on assistance (slightly different than simply shopping on a budget, due to added financial limitations) and cooking on a budget.
- D. Explore the opportunity to expand food literacy class locations to include locations where priority populations access other programs in their communities (e.g. North Hastings locations, in schools).
- E. Explore the feasibility of distributing a summary of all the programs available to residents and that could be distributed to everyone in the community. This should be provided in a widely accessible format and should include offline options, such as mail flyers. Some respondents expressed a desire for more information about how to contribute and help those in need.

Communications for Food System Stakeholders

- F. Develop a public health guide for school food programs explaining regulations and best practices that are typically targeted towards commercial businesses.
- G. Request clarification from the Ministry of Health about whether the major community groups would be exempt as Food Service Premises under On. Reg. 493/17, Section 2(2)(b). If they are not, HPEPH should develop a resource to understand the requirements in plain language which community groups could more easily interpret.
- H. Connect with purchasing services staff at the Hastings Prince Edward District School Board and consider sitting on the purchasing services Evaluation Committee to provide expertise when evaluating food services contractors.^{ix}

^{ix} Recommendation based on personal communication with the Hastings Prince Edward District School Board.

Communication Between the Food System Stakeholders

- I. In partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) Economic Development Department, host a half-day workshop with the Prince Edward Learning Centre, CDC Quinte, agricultural stakeholders, and other nutrition program stakeholders to facilitate strategies for food access programs to source local foods.^x
- J. Continue to engage and work alongside OMAFRA Economic Development staff, and municipal economic development staff to support value-added processors in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties.
- K. Maintain the momentum of the Advisory Committee for this project by hosting informal meetings twice per year to discuss updates, gaps, and opportunities within food access programs (including programs for food insecure households, as well as preventive programs such as the development of a food policy council) in HPEC. This group may include CDC Quinte, Harvest Hastings, Ontario Works, and Food for Learning, among others.

^x For example, see the City of Thunder Bay's Advanced Local Food Procurement Guide (2014).
http://tbfoodstrategy.ca/files/4814/4623/0805/Appendix_C_-_Advanced_Local_Food_Procurement_Guide_TB_Feb_2015.pdf

5.3 Shifting to Self-Sustaining Models

- A. Explore opportunities to support social enterprise development in HPEC.^{xi}
- B. Support the CDC Quinte in expanding its Good Food Markets and Good Food Box programs, among others. Support may include communications and providing letters of support for grant applications.
- C. Continue engagement in initiatives that can support extending the growing season in HPEC (*i.e.*, aquaponics, indoor farming, greenhouse infrastructure).
- D. Support stakeholders in implementing the recommendations of the *Hastings County: Future of Farming* report. In particular, consider providing information on food safety requirements and support with navigating health-related regulatory challenges for undertaking a feasibility study to assess potential new community food infrastructure (see recommendation 6 in the *Future of Farming* report).^{xii}
- E. Reduce barriers to accessing food banks by advocating to eliminate the requirement for means-testing at HPEC food banks.
- F. The CDC Quinte should connect with Ontario Works to explore the opportunity to use their offices as distribution points for programs such as the Baby Boxes, and Good Food Boxes. This would expand the pick-up times currently offered by these programs to accommodate for some of the Ontario Works clients.^{xiii}
- G. In collaboration with the Working Group (see also recommendation 5.2, H), explore the opportunity to better leverage the tourism industry in peak season to support food access programs for residents.

^{xi} Examples include [the SEED](#) (Guelph), [The Working Centre](#) (Kitchener/Waterloo), and [The Stop](#) (Toronto).

^{xii} Recommendation based on personal communication with Harvest Hastings.

^{xiii} Recommendation based on personal communication with Ontario Works.

6.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

Three key priorities for HPEPH to consider when supporting access to nutritious foods include advocacy, communication, and supporting food access programs in shifting towards self-sustaining models.

The recommendations are focused on activities that HPEPH can implement to enact change. They are, however, collaborative in nature and will draw upon the strength of networks within HPEC. The following table outlines the key stakeholders to be engaged in the implementation of each recommendation.

Table 2. Summary of stakeholders to be engaged in the implementation of each recommendation.

Reference	HPEPH	School Boards	Municipalities	Provincial Government	Community Organizations
ADVOACAY	5.1 A	✓		✓	✓
	5.1 B	✓		✓	
	5.1 C	✓			
	5.1 D	✓		✓	✓
COMMUNICATION	5.2 A	✓	✓		
	5.2 B	✓			✓
	5.2 C	✓			✓
	5.2 D	✓			✓
	5.2 E	✓		✓	✓
	5.2 F	✓	✓		✓
	5.2 G	✓	✓		✓
	5.2 H	✓	✓		
	5.2 I	✓		✓	✓
	5.2 J	✓			✓
	5.2 K	✓			✓
SHIFTING TO SELF-SUSTAINING MODELS	5.3 A	✓			✓
	5.3 B	✓		✓	
	5.3 C	✓		✓	✓
	5.3 D	✓			✓
	5.3 E	✓			✓
	5.3 F			✓	✓
	5.3 G	✓		✓	✓

7.0 Appendix

7.1 Glossary

Asset: Resources unique to a region or community that could be leveraged for positive change.⁵

Community: A group of people living in the same area or having a shared ideology.

Community Food Assessment: A community-focused study of the food system meant to increase knowledge about local food-related needs and resources. This includes identifying local assets, partnerships, and opportunities.

Community Food Security: The position paper adopted by the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) provides the following definition.¹

Community Food Security (CFS), from a public health perspective, has four main dimensions:

Community Food Security is a strategy for ensuring secure access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for everyone, produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity.

It features cooperation among all contributors in a local/regional food system, including growers and producers, citizen groups, community agencies, governmental organizations, businesses, academic researchers and environmental advocates.

Its actions are based on those of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion: building personal skills, strengthening community action, building healthy public policy and creating supportive environments (including the general principles of food safety that are ensured by monitoring and enforcement activities).

It addresses issues in the economic, environmental and social aspects of the food system, and thus promotes adequate incomes for consumers and producers; local and diverse food production; environmental sustainability; protection of local agricultural lands and fish habitat; widespread access to healthy food; and food-based community economic development and social cohesion.

Community Garden: A small plot of land cultivated by a group of people inside a city or in small communities. These gardens can produce fruit, vegetables, and/or ornamental crops.⁶

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): An alternative approach of food production and distribution that allows the producer and consumer to share the risks and rewards of farming.⁷

CSA shareholders make an upfront payment to support the farm and in return, receives a supply of fresh vegetables during the growing season.⁷

Farmers' Markets: A food market at which local farmers sell fruit and vegetables and often meat, cheese, and bakery products directly to consumers.

Food Literacy: Food literacy is a set of interconnected attributes that influence eating patterns. It encompasses individual attributes as well as the attributes of an individual's surroundings. Individual attributes include: 1) an understanding of food and nutrition, 2) the ability to buy, prepare, handle and store food, 3) feelings of confidence about choosing, preparing, and eating food, and 4) making healthier food decisions most of the time.⁸ Attributes of an individual's surroundings that improve food literacy include: having a supportive food system; food environment; living situation; and culture and traditions.⁸

Nutritious Food: Foods that are the foundation for a pattern of eating that is associated with positive health outcomes. Nutritious food include but are not limited to: vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and protein foods that are commonly found in patterns of eating linked with beneficial effects on health.⁹

Household Food Insecurity: The inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.¹⁰ Food insecurity may prevent individuals from maintaining good health by affecting the quality and quantity of the food they obtain and eat. Food insecurity status reflects a household's financial situation as well as the household's assets such as property, a vehicle, and other resources.¹⁰ Research has shown that food insecurity can be reduced through public policies that improve the financial circumstances of low-income households.¹⁰

Local Food: Food that is grown, harvested, and/or processed in Hastings County or Prince Edward County.

7.2 References

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