

Muskoka Food System Consultation Report



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District of Muskoka

SAVOUR Muskoka

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit:

- Chronic Disease Prevention – Healthy Lifestyle Team
- Healthy Communities Partnership

With thanks to the residents of the District of Muskoka for their input and support.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is one part of the information being gathered which will inform a Steering Committee made up of local stakeholders in the District of Muskoka as they work towards developing a local food charter. It summarizes the results of five open community forums held during March of 2013. The consultations were designed to gain feedback about what is really important to Muskoka stakeholders regarding their food system.

A food charter is a document that outlines a community's vision and priorities on matters related to food and their local food system. Once developed and endorsed by the community, including its decision-makers, a food charter can be used by municipalities, local service-providers, community groups and many others as a guide to making decisions that are consistent with charter priorities. These could be decisions about policies, programs, community initiatives or even personal choices. This report outlines the process used in gathering community input to inform a local food charter and the results gathered from conversations around five key questions regarding their personal food habits and their opinions regarding the Muskoka food system in general.

2.0 THE PROCESS USED

A Steering Committee was formed to coordinate the process which began with eight sessions in Huntsville, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Ryde, Dwight, Baysville, Port Sydney and Port Carling for the purpose of educating the general public about the food system and food charters and encouraging participation in consultations. In preparation for the five consultations, a Charter logo was designed, which appears on the front of this report, and the following promotional steps were taken (copies of some of these can be found in Appendix A of this report):

- posters were distributed across the District
- an "email blast" was sent to multiple stakeholder networks
- radio and print advertisements were circulated
- consultation information was placed into each Fresh Food Basket distributed across the District in March
- a listing of the consultations was posted on the websites of SAVOUR Muskoka, Muskoka Community Information and several municipalities, and
- "word of mouth"

A Consultant was hired to assist in developing the format for the consultations, to facilitate the sessions and provide the results in this report.

The five consultations, which were designed to gain feedback about what is really important to Muskoka stakeholders regarding their food system, were held March 27 - 29, 2013 in Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Rosseau and the Township of Georgian Bay with a variety of times during

business hours and in the evening. Volunteer facilitators and recorders, recruited from the organizations that comprise the Steering Committee assisted with the conversations in small groups. Each session ran for approximately two and a half hours and saw small groups address a series of questions. Each table started with a different question so no question was left unaddressed if time were to run short.

Appendix B contains the Detailed Design for the sessions, Appendix C has the slides used to introduce the session and set up the consultative task, Appendix D has the questions asked, and the “Cheat Sheet” used to assist the small discussion group facilitators is in Appendix E.

Direct funding for the initiative, to cover such things as the Consultant, the venues, the food and promotions, was provided by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care through the Healthy Communities Partnership Program of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. The agencies associated with the Muskoka Food and Agriculture Charter Steering Committee provided significant in-kind contributions with their staff being involved in logistics, facilitating, recording, and consultation promotion.

Limitations to the Process:

In interpreting the results presented here, it is important to appreciate that there were some limitations in the process used. Several people attended multiple consultations and their comments may have been over represented in the final tally. However, not all of these individuals repeated their input across sessions. Since the notes from the discussions, by design, did not include attribution to particular people, it was not possible to determine the extent to which this may have happened, so it is recognized that it could be a limitation.

The views or opinions captured in the information presented here are those of the original speakers at the consultations, either in quote format or summarized across consultations, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of other participants or the organizers. What appear to be stated as facts should be validated before making decisions based on them.

Because the call for participation in the consultations was open to anyone, each one brought a different mix of people with a variety of opinions. The sessions were not designed to reach consensus on the questions asked but rather foster individual input. Volunteer recorders found it challenging to capture all the discussion at times.

3.0 RESULTS

In analyzing the results across the five sessions, the data for each question asked was amalgamated and an assessment of any differences between the sessions was done. Then, the individual comments recorded in each small group across the five sessions for each question were clustered together to establish themes and identify the frequency with which each theme was raised.

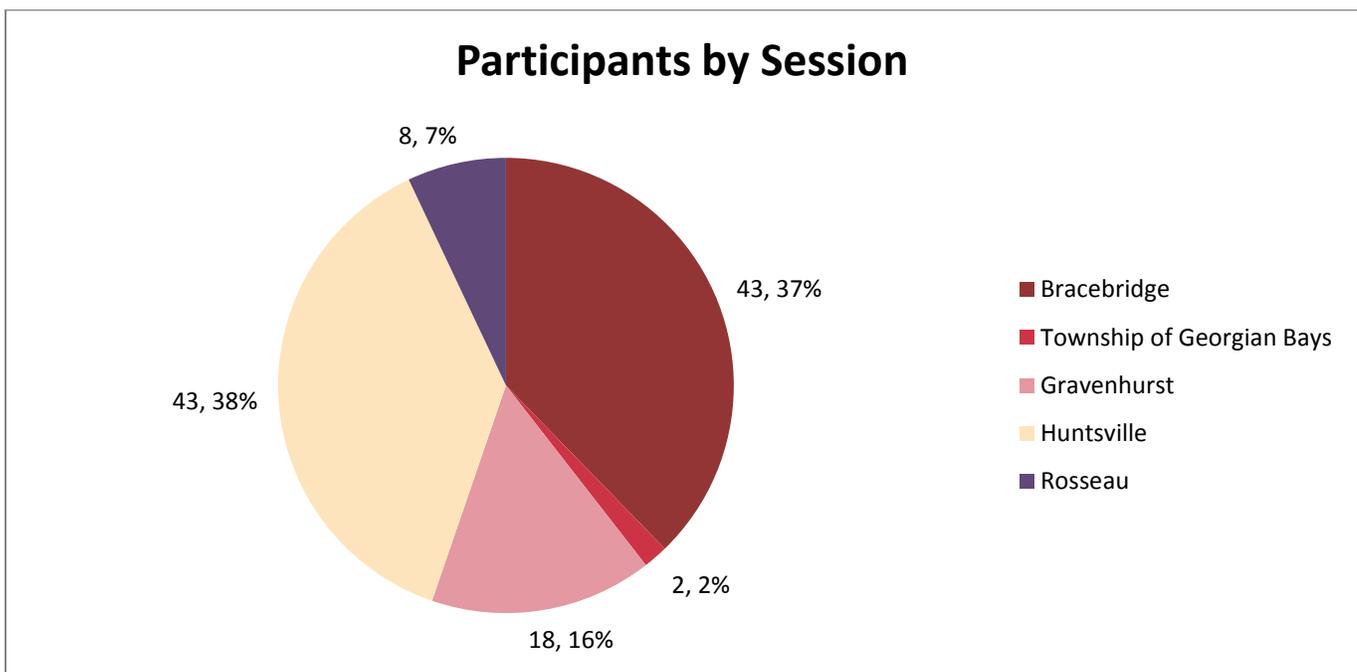
In presenting the results within the report, the themes are presented for each question posed as they emerged across the five sessions. There are multiple themes for each question and these are consistently presented in descending order of frequency such that the first theme is the one most often mentioned across the five consultations. In some cases, single comments that did not fit within any theme have been shared at the end of the theme list.

Often a theme is accompanied by examples of specific comments provided during the consultations to illustrate the point. Unless otherwise denoted, these are not presented in any particular order within a theme. Where frequency has been included for these points within a theme, descriptors have been used that relate to how often this point was mentioned across the small discussion groups in the five consultations. The words used to describe the responses fall in a continuum: most, many, several, a few, a couple, one.

When less common terms from the discussions were included in the report, definitions have been provided where available through an internet search.

3.1 Participation

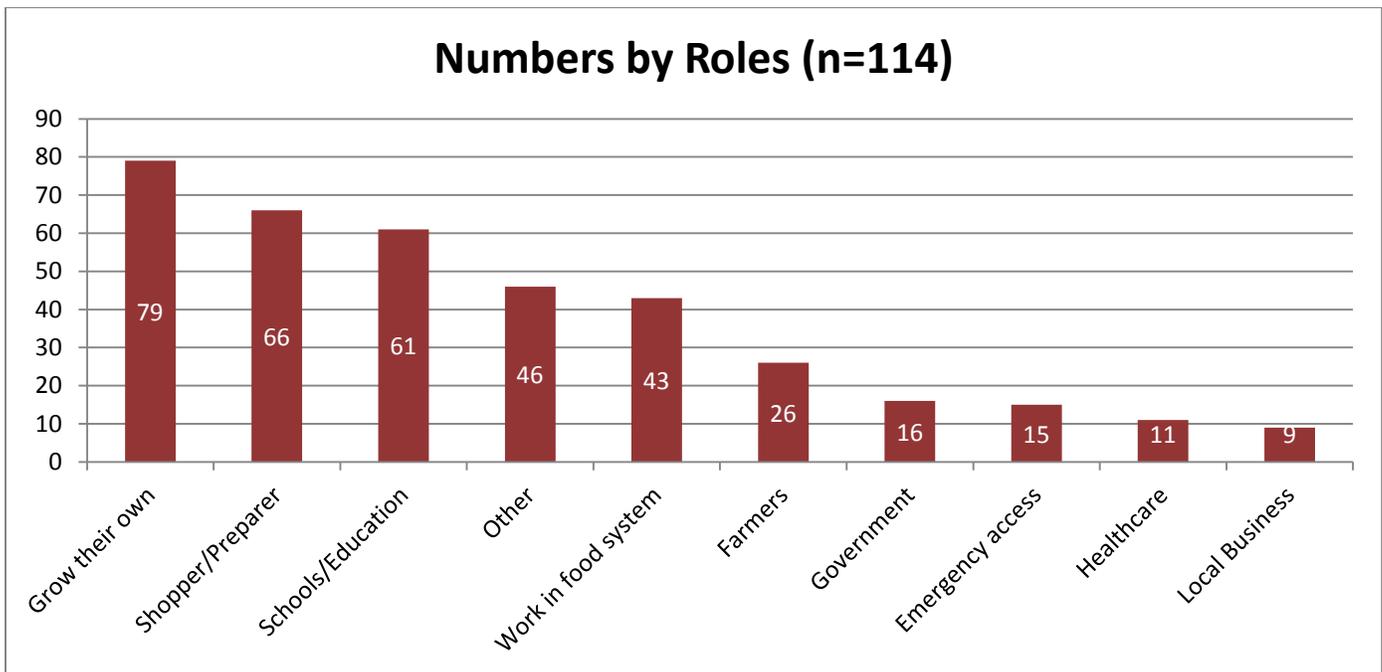
Overall, 114 people participated in the five consultations. The graph below identifies the number at each.



Participants were asked what link to the food system they brought to the consultations. Many people identified several linkages as illustrated in the graph below. The most common one, mentioned by almost 80% of participants, were those who grow their own gardens or raise meat for their families. Just over 65% identified themselves as the primary shopper/food preparer in the home followed by the 61% who were involved in schools/education. People whose work

focuses on the food system, such as retailers, restaurateurs or producers represented almost 45% of participants, rounding out the four most frequent categories into which the 114 participants fit.

The “Other” category represents people who brought additional roles to the discussion that they felt were not captured in the categories suggested. This group included those in the field of fitness and wellness, food activists, environmental protection, media, people with special food needs themselves or in ones they care for, providers of community kitchens, people in the arts & culture sector and the tourism sector.



3.2 What Does “Local” Mean?

As part of a broader question, participants were asked how they would define the term local as it pertains to their local food system.

The most frequent response to this question is the identification of gradients. Ideally, local meant as close to home as possible; your yard, farm gates, farmers’ markets, regional levels. Several identify that the radius for what is currently considered to be local is growing larger, such that it encompasses Canada. There are many who subscribe to the concept that local is what can be grown within a 100 mile/170 kilometre/one hour radius. Several identify that the definition of local varies by type of food. Some suggest specific boundaries such that Muskoka is the boundary, or that Parry Sound and Holland Marsh should be included as local but the Toronto Food Terminal was too far. Some define local as what it *didn’t* include, such as Mexico and China. One suggests the boundary should shift in the colder months when less fresh foods are available locally. Another describes local to be what is available to the community should there be no gasoline to bring food into the area, while another referred to “as far as I can ride a horse in one day and back” as being local.

For some, the interpretation of the word local was tied to food sovereignty. This is described by International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.”

Other participant descriptors for what is considered local include:

- Eat, in season, the food that is grown in our areas or can be picked and stored here.
- Eat what supports local producers.
- Eat what is available of sufficient quality.
- Eat whatever has ALL ingredients grown locally (including spices).

The variety of interpretations of the term local suggests that it means many things to many people. Should the term become an element of the resulting food charter, more consensus on this term might be required if it is to be understood the same way by all.

3.3 Concerns with the Local Food System

Also as part of the broader question regarding the use of the term local, people were asked what concerns, if any, they had with their local food system.

For this and subsequent questions posed to the participants, as stated earlier, the views or opinions captured in the information presented here are those of the original speakers at the consultations, either in quote format or summarized across consultations, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of other participants or the organizers. What appear to be stated as facts should be validated before making decisions based on them. The purpose of the consultations was not to debate the facts but to share experiences and opinions.

The issue of the relatively high cost of local food was often raised when groups were addressing this issue. Cost was also a common response to the topic of “Challenges and Successes for Families” which was addressed in another question. In order to keep most of the cost comments together, they appear in the latter category, Section 3.4 of this report.

The six most common themes emerging through the conversations are presented here in descending order of frequency.

i. Limited access to food for all

This is far and above the most commonly mentioned concern across all five consultations. Limited access to food is attributed to several things including systemic issues such as a lack of public or affordable private transportation and the challenging financial conditions that many felt were quite widespread in the District.

- Shoppers in low income situations cannot afford and, in many cases, have no means by which to travel to multiple locations to purchase local products not readily available in local stores.

- Transportation is also an issue for farmers who need to get their food to market, both in terms of cost and availability of staff to take it there.
- Living in Muskoka, especially during the tourist season, is already very costly leaving less income available for food, which is also higher priced “in season” than other places in the province.
- Local milk and dairy products, beef, and grains are identified by many as being particularly lacking in Muskoka.
- A stockpile of local food will be required if the area is to survive a crisis. Similarly, the system is so focused on “just in time” delivery that any disruption in receiving shipments will shut down the local availability of food.
- Food access is identified as particularly challenging during the winter months, however, food storage systems and preserving were felt to be one way of alleviating the issue. A systemic, community-wide approach to this is needed; not an individual home based approach.
- Currently, Muskoka does not produce enough food to feed the population. There is no Food Emergency Preparedness strategy for the District.
- Availability of water during the growing season (e.g., summer of 2012 was very dry and crops suffered, thereby raising the sale price and reducing availability).

ii. Muskoka needs more local producers

This was the second most frequently mentioned concern that was raised regarding the local food system across the five consultations. Specific comments related to this need are:

- Dairy and grain producers are lacking.
- There are land owners who need people to farm their lands.
- There is a lack of municipal and provincial support for young farmers (e.g., incentives, subsidies). It is reported that subsidies are available to corporate farms but not to smaller local ones.
- 50% of Muskoka farmers will be retiring within the next ten years.
- Large-scale, commercial farms are not something Muskoka can support. Details as to the rationale for this statement were not captured.
- Land that is not currently being farmed is being sold for residential and tourism development so the potential amount of farmland is decreasing.
- There are unused opportunities with urban agriculture and edible landscaping to plant food-bearing trees and plants rather than flowers.
- There is no local mentoring program for those who want to start gardening/farming.

iii. Farmers’ Markets are not readily accessible

- There is no provincial association for these so each operates under its own rules, which is confusing to vendors and customers. The people regulating the local

markets are not economists who are familiar with business which also is identified as a concern.

- There are challenges for farmers to access the markets when also farming.
- Hours are not conducive to working families generally.
- The closure of the market in Huntsville is mentioned by many as being very unfortunate. It is felt that a mixture of municipal/health regulations on what could be sold combined with a lack of knowledge by the consumers regarding the value of farmers markets are to blame. The move of this particular market to Dwight is better than it being closed but there is still a gap for weekend shoppers in Huntsville.
- There appears to be a competition between the Business Improvement Associations and the farmers' markets, and the supermarkets and local food producers.

iv. The food system is too regulated

- Government restrictions on the number of animals allowed are reducing operations. Hens for personal consumption are mentioned as an example.
- New abattoir regulations are cost-prohibitive.
- Farmers are reluctant to have themselves included on local food access maps because they believe this may open them to more regulatory inspections.
- Some specific regulations, such as the inability to use locally grown herbs, negatively impact local restaurants' practices.
- Farmers are not able to sell directly to local stores which in turn restricts local food availability. This is felt to be partially due to not having bar codes attached to most local food that could otherwise be sold.
- The corporate policies of large supermarket chains (and some large resort chains) prohibit offering local foods.
- By-laws regarding restrictions on such things as where and when farmers' markets can occur are described as "archaic". No further details were captured in this regard.
- Several could see themselves starting small food based businesses as part of a local food economy; however by-laws and safety regulations (for such things as commercial kitchens) can make that costly and difficult to navigate.
- Rules have changed regarding the use of fresh road kill so perfectly good food is wasted (e.g., deer, moose).

"Laws are creating hunger."

v. The food supply system is ineffective

- There is not enough local storage space accessible to farmers to ensure accessibility to local food year-round.

- Only 7% of locally produced food in Muskoka is consumed locally; the rest is exported.
- There is too much local dependence on Wal-Mart and other big box stores.
- No supply and demand chain has been established. Farmers don't know how much to grow for local markets.
- The food system is governed to a large extent by what can be grown in the local soil.
- Seeds are often mentioned as a concern. Specifically, the integrity of them is called into question.
- Food labeling can be misleading. For example, "Canada Grade A" may be attached to foods from other countries that may or may not meet the Canadian standard for Grade A status, but are not made, manufactured or grown in Canada. Also related to labeling is a concern that there is no labeling on any foods, including locally grown, as to what pesticides have been used.

vi. Managing food waste is a growing issue of which many are unaware

- There is no universal, organic food waste system in place, or even planned.
- Too much of our food goes to waste unnecessarily because people think it is unusable.
- Local farmers are not supported in purchasing relevant food waste to feed animals.

vii. The focus should be on food sovereignty, then food security

- This concept was only raised a few times across the consultations and is mentioned here because it is distinct from any of the above categories.
- *"If Muskoka were food sovereign, the food at the food banks would be organic, local and fresh instead of industrial. Then work could begin at being food secure."*

The concerns shared span the spectrum of a typical food system that involves the production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food. A lack of access by all to healthy, affordable, local foods is the most prevalent of the concerns raised and this is attributed, in turn, to many different factors. In raising these concerns, many participants offered suggestions for change. These are captured in a section of the report called Implementation Ideas, which forms Appendix H.

3.4 Challenges & Successes for Families

The third component of the broader question that addresses the local food situation, asked participants to identify the challenges and successes they experience when feeding their children/families healthy foods. Challenges were generally raised more often than successes so are presented in the first section below, followed by the successes.

a) Challenges

There are seven themes that emerged across the consultations. These are presented in the descending order in which they were most frequently mentioned in each consultation.

i. Cost

As mentioned in Section 3.3, the affordability of food was raised as a concern during that part of the discussion as well as here in the Challenges section. The comments on this topic are amalgamated into this one area. Even before adding in the details generated in the Concerns section, the topic of cost is the one most frequently identified across all five consultations. Specific contributions to the challenge of affordable food are identified as:

- There are many people accessing emergency food supports in Muskoka. For example, the Table Food Bank served 9.6% of the Huntsville population in 2012, representing a significant part of the population that comes for help. People come to that food bank from 23 other villages and towns.
- It is not that local food is overpriced but other mass produced food is underpriced. There is no level playing field.
- Food becomes the flexible budget item for many and those living in poverty, of which there are many in Muskoka; need to make choices that often mean inadequate food in the home.
- The start-up costs for a home garden or things such as a chicken coop are prohibitive for some.
- It is hard to convince families that making their own food is usually less expensive (e.g., \$4.00 for one Happy Meal vs. \$60.00 for 60 servings of homemade stew that is healthier and uses local ingredients).

"We've become spoiled as consumers to expect everything year-round. Might appreciate them more if we could only have them in accordance with the local season."

ii. Skills

A variety of skills are felt to be missing which contributes significantly to the current situation. The comments generated during the discussion related to skills are integrated with those from the specific question on the topic of Food Skills, which can be found in Section 3.7 of this report.

iii. Local Selection of Food

- The lack of availability of farmers' markets throughout the District is felt to be a huge challenge by many in terms of being accessible in the first place, the hours of opening that did not accommodate working people, the amount of non-local food (either from outside the area or non-food items altogether) available and only being available seasonally.
- When transportation is limited, families often shop at smaller, neighbourhood or village stores where there is much less selection, food is generally not as fresh, and

the cost is higher than at a larger store. In some cases, people report having to leave the community altogether just to get fresh foods (e.g., MacTier).

- Meeting the needs of special diets is difficult in Muskoka, especially when cost is a consideration.
- Most restaurants are closed for the majority of the year and several cafeterias in local hospitals have closed. These closures make it more likely that people will purchase unhealthier foods and not local ones from fast food outlets, variety stores and vending machines, all of which can be more expensive than local foods.
- There are not enough community gardens available for those who want to or could use them.
- For those who need to access food banks, the quality and selection of food is not ideal and food banks typically are not able to refrigerate or store fresh produce.

iv. Time

- Many feel that more people do not make the effort to eat healthy local foods because of a perceived lack of time. There are several aspects to this:
 - The time it takes to travel to several food outlets to get all the food needed when there is not a central depot available, which is felt to be the case in most areas within Muskoka.
 - The time to develop a meal plan that relies on local ingredients.
 - The time to prepare meals at home given busy work, school and recreational schedules.
 - Families are so busy that there is often no family meal time, much less joint preparation time.

v. Existing Habits

- Many mention that a cultural/societal shift is necessary to fundamentally change our typical diet to one that is based on what is in season or preserved and not what the media portrays as trendy (e.g., pomegranates) or what can be imported from other countries.
- Moving away from processed foods is a challenge, particularly when children's palates become accustomed to those tastes. People might even be addicted to this type of food making change very difficult.
- When trying to make nutritional decisions for a family based on healthy local foods, it is named as a challenge when the extended family and other caregivers are not supportive of these choices, often because they do not share those habits.
- The access children have to the many options for "fun" foods such as "Happy Meals", cartoon cereals and "Lunchables" is a challenge for parents to avoid.

vi. Transportation

- The lack of a car is a huge challenge for families to access affordable, fresh, healthy food of any kind, let alone that which is produced locally.
- Even with access to a car, the constantly rising cost of fuel provides another challenge.
- Some connect transportation to the environment in that, even when fuel is affordable, there is reluctance in some to drive to several locations to access a variety of local foods because of the environmental impact / carbon footprint.

vii. Knowledge

- It is mentioned by many that generally people do not know the benefits (to the environment or to health) of eating local foods. There is also felt to be a lack of knowledge regarding what foods are actually healthy.
- Kids do not know where their food comes from.
- Better knowledge is needed around what permaculture¹ is and how to substitute it for spices.
- It is challenging to know what to prepare when there are limited recipes available that focus on locally available foods.

viii. Other

The following concerns were raised only once during the discussion groups:

- Hunting is not appreciated as an acceptable local food source. Buying meat at the grocery stores, where it is assumed animals have not been hurt in the process, is more accepted.
- Animals infringe on home gardens making it difficult to harvest much sometimes.
- Very challenging for parents to overcome the messaging in the marketing and advertising geared to children.
- The logistics of home gardening that involve accessing space and water is challenging.

b) Successes

The successes identified were much less frequently mentioned than the challenges but include the following, which typically come from mothers of young children with a commitment to eating, and often growing, local healthy food.

- Many mention great success in growing their own home gardens.

¹ The development of agricultural ecosystems intended to be sustainable and self-sufficient.
Extracted from <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/permaculture>

- Several see the existing farmers' markets, even though many are only seasonal and have many products other than locally produced foods, as successes and worth supporting and fighting for in order to see them continue.
- Informal co-ops are happening underground which increases access but only if you are "in the know".
- There are two specific examples of local initiatives that are felt to make it easier for families to eat healthy: "All Fired Up" restaurant in Bracebridge that features food from local growers and "Seedy Saturday", a seed exchange project in McKellar.
- Happy, healthy kids are the result of, in large part, healthy eating.
- Food is an effective centre of the family and can build a sense of community, building intimacy together and celebrating togetherness.
- Children participating in food growing projects from beginning to "on the table".
- Success is also described as knowing where your food comes from and trusting that source.
- Kids and families trying new foods.

When considering the successes and challenges related to feeding families in Muskoka, recurring themes emerge similar to the previous discussion area regarding concerns with the local food system. Cost is a key element, forming part of the challenge regarding overall access to local food. Of the two central themes for the successes that were shared, one focuses on access as well, identifying circumstances where access is positive. The other theme of the successes focuses on familial aspects of food and the value it contributes to quality of life in the home. This is closely linked to the content in another discussion area on Food Value described later in this report.

3.5 The Relationship Between Food and the Local Economy

The fourth and final aspect of the broad question regarding the current situation of food in Muskoka asked people to comment on the relationship between food and the local economy. A few prompts were offered by the facilitators to focus the conversation: fair wages, affordability, job creation, artisanal food products, using local products, building new farms, food/culinary tourism.

Once again, the cost of food is raised repeatedly. In this section, those comments that relate to the overall financial economy of the community are presented. Other aspects of cost that address it from more of an individual perspective are summarized above in the Challenges presented as part of Section 3.4.

It is identified from many of the consultations that local food for sale in the community is typically higher priced than mass produced foods imported into Muskoka. In order to compete, some farmers drop their prices beyond what it actually costs to produce. Many farmers also cater to the tourist market so they can keep their prices higher, thereby making the cost even more prohibitive for the year-round residents. It is felt that consumers do not know the true value of

food, nor do they appreciate the reasons for higher costs for local food. Since there are not many local people buying local food, there is not much buying power; therefore they do not have much influence on change. A growing consumer base is needed.

Employment concerns are raised many times and most often centred on the following:

- Farm workers are typically not paid a fair wage.
 - This often extends to the farmers themselves.
- Because workers cannot be employed year round, good workers are lost and there is a whole new set of employees, with a steep learning curve, when starting the next year.
- Seasonal workers brought in from other countries take jobs away from local unemployed people; however, the local folks don't appear to want those jobs creating a vicious cycle. Seasonal workers from the community and from foreign countries should be treated the same, in a positive and respectful manner.

However, many feel that foreign workers should not be employed when there are local, capable people unemployed.
- Mentioned elsewhere, but also relevant here, is the need for succession planning because of the pending retirement of many local farmers in the next 10 years.

"If our food was all produced and processed locally everyone would be employed."

The cost to the economy of the approximate 40% of food that is wasted could be prevented through changes in policies that govern settings such as restaurants. For example, allowing restaurants to distribute leftover food to shelters.

The need for subsidies and such things as interest free loans for small local farmers in order to preserve precious farm land is mentioned in this section of the discussion as well as in section 3.3, as outlined earlier.

Several gaps are identified in the existing economic strategies in Muskoka, such as agri-tourism, food/culinary tourism in the off season and marketing campaigns to buy local that were as effective as those marketing free trade messages for coffee shops.

Enhancing food tourism is suggested by several as something that has the potential for high impact on the local economy.

It is identified by several that the average resident in Muskoka does not understand the relationship between food and the economy. If people knew which foods were local and what their purchase would be contributing to the economy, several people feel more would buy local if their finances allowed.

"Muskoka needs to find a path away from the low self-esteem / tourist-based jobs and find viability in jobs surrounding food production which will build self-esteem / self-reliance."

3.6 Purchasing Habits

Participants were asked where they primarily access their daily foods, what most influences these decisions and the frequency with which they visit local farms/markets. Lastly, access to local fresh food was explored in terms of how that could be improved in the District.

a) Where Daily Food is Accessed

With respect to where food is accessed, there is a range of responses. The most frequently cited source of daily food across all five consultations is that which was grown themselves for as long as the stock remained. Several dehydrate, can or otherwise preserve their fresh foods to extend the “eating season”. Ultimately, at some point in the winter, they reluctantly turn to a local supermarket. However, some report a deliberate choice to eat less fresh produce during the winter because “it is not inspiring to buy it”. This commitment to eating homegrown foods is not surprising given that 79% of those attending the consultations indicated they grow their own food.

Many identify that they “shopped around” at a variety of farms and markets in order to get the best prices (e.g., eggs from Dwight, meat from Utterson and local bread). A few identify the Fresh Food Basket program as a regular source of food while a few others share that they would purchase small products such as eggs at “underground producers”. This notion of “underground” food sources is mentioned a few times, but additional details as to what they referred to were not provided at the time.

Butchers are the preferred source of meat, as several mention being wary of that sold in grocery stores. For baked goods, especially those wanting gluten free options, local bakeries are the spot of choice with those using local ground wheat being of higher preference.

Health food stores are mentioned often, but usually only for things that are not available anywhere else locally, because of the high cost.

There are some specific sources identified:

- **FRESHCO** supermarket is felt to be the least expensive local source.
- Independent Grocers need to be better and more equipped with local/discounted foods (before thrown away).
- In smaller centres, such as MacTier and Coldwater, local Foodland stores are mentioned most frequently.
- Specialty stores such as the organic store in Bracebridge are sometimes mentioned.
- A Costco trip about once a month is common for several.
- Farm store in Port Sydney.
- Hewitts for corn.

b) Influences on Daily Food Choices

Participants were prompted to include convenience foods in their thinking about their daily food choices. For consultation participants, fresh and local food is the most frequently mentioned influence on food purchases, with organic sometimes also being a consideration.

Cost is a very close second in terms of frequency of mention across the five consultations. With respect to cost, some grocery stores are felt to generally be less expensive (e.g., **FRESHCO**). People are also influenced, related to cost, by what is on sale or discounted before being thrown out, foods available for less cost when purchased in bulk, what coupons are available, and the perception of overall value. Also related to cost, some need to purchase when their support cheque(s) arrive and this might not coincide with desired items being on sale.

The third most frequently mentioned influence is the healthiness of the food and whether it is part of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.

Convenience came in as the fourth most frequently mentioned influence on purchasing, often from the perspective of being able to get all foods in one place rather than driving to several. This is directly related to time available for shopping. It is also noted that there are more stores offering processed and packaged foods, such as Shoppers Drug Mart, Wal-Mart and Giant Tiger. As well, drive-thru's for "fast food" seem to be open even later. These kinds of things make it easier to buy the food when shopping for something else. However, the Fresh Food Basket program is also identified as a convenient and popular way, particularly in MacTier, to get fresh foods.

Other influences on purchasing habits that were mentioned only by a few participants each were:

- Frame of mind, mood while shopping – shopping can be overwhelming at times.
- Meal plans and recipes.
- "What my kids will eat"; family likes and dislikes.
- Skills in knowing how to cook it and a recipe to use it.
- Propaganda on packaging.
- Longevity of the food – *"With multiple kids, bananas will be gone in one day while crackers will last a lot longer."*
- Less likely to prepare a meal when I am on my own, as opposed to cooking for a family.
- Where I can get to (e.g., trolley timing is often limiting).
- Avoiding genetically modified foods.
- If Consumer Supported Agriculture programs are readily available in the area, they would sign up for one.

c) Accessing Local Farms and Markets

When asked if they ever visited local farms or farmers' markets and what could make access to these easier, those attending the consultations express the overwhelming preference for

accessing local foods and are, for the most part, used to having to travel around to a variety of outlets to get what they needed. A few mention crop sharing as a way to access foods. A general sentiment expressed at the time was that if one is passionate enough about eating local, then the food is fairly easy to find.

People mention being more likely to purchase local products from a producer that they know and trust. It is also mentioned a few times that many generate their own foods, in season, from fishing and hunting.

In terms of gaps in availability, bulk sales from trucks is identified as something that seems to be lacking now. The hours when markets are open increases the difficulty in accessing fresh foods. Locally produced meat and milk are identified as foods that are generally less available in Muskoka and both of these seem to have decreased in recent years. Another thing making access to local foods more difficult is transportation; either the lack of public transit or a personal vehicle or the cost of fuel.

"Muskoka needs to embrace the fact that we are here for tourists - stop complaining about it, accept it and deal with it, because that's where the money comes from."

A few identify that the farmers' markets, which are mostly open on weekends or during daytime business hours, cater to the tourists/cottagers and, in fact, are attended by more tourists than locals.

d) Ease of Access to Fresh Local Produce and Meat

This topic is addressed through previous questions so only new information is presented here.

People were specifically asked if they found it easy to access fresh, locally grown produce and meat in Muskoka. Many participants across the five consultations remark that the ease of access to fresh and local food is dramatically more difficult in the off-season when cottagers and tourists are not in residence. There is an appreciation that economically this is understandable because the purchasing population is so much smaller but there is also a strong sentiment that this is undesirable and does not seem fair to those who live in Muskoka year round.

Many small farmgate sales locations are identified, often with very specific food (e.g., honey, berries, corn) with fewer options for places with multiple products (more like a market). It is noted that no fresh local fish is available in local stores.

Gaps are identified in a few areas. Honey Harbour, MacTier, and Dwight are specifically identified as areas that often do not have desired items, or things are often stale, except for the few weeks in the summer when tourists are around.

e) Degree to Which Foods Purchased are "In Season" or "Local"

Almost all participants report a deliberate attempt to buy local first, then from Ontario, and last from Canadian products although several identify this as challenging because of a lack of labeling as to where many items are produced.

Buying local foods in season is almost a universal practice and during these times, those foods make up a greater proportion of their diet.

In summarizing purchasing habits across all the sub-questions asked, once again cost emerges as the leading contributing factor. Shoppers generally want to purchase local and fresh foods as long as they are available and affordable, but the months of the year when seasonal residents are not around makes this more challenging. There is also a desire to shop at farmers' markets, either a single farmgate location or at venues where several are present but several barriers are identified, most often relating to them not being available at all, or only for a very short period of the year, or too spread out across the District to make it feasible to "make the rounds" for various commodities.

*"Food is not a right, it's a duty.
We are all responsible to work
for our food."*

3.7 Food Skills

There were two questions posed in this section of the consultations: what food skills need improvement and where most food waste occurs in the District.

a) What Food Skills Need to be Improved in Muskoka and Why?

There are many different skills identified as lacking in the general population. Comments generated in the earlier discussion on Challenges in Section 3.4 that relate to Skills are integrated here as well.

It is suggested by a few that skill development opportunities such as workshops should be available at no cost and be well advertised. Further, people should first be taught the WHY, and then the HOW of what the skills are. The specific areas in which a lack of skills was identified are listed below in the descending order of the frequency with which they were mentioned.

- Preserving / canning and other storage methods (although a few identify that there seems to be a resurgence in these skills in young people)
 - Building, using, maintaining a root cellar
- Methods of food preparation, particularly in children
 - Cooking from scratch
 - Using leftovers
 - Measurement conversions
 - Developing meal plans and shopping accordingly
- How to grow your own food
 - When to plant and harvest what

- How to create edible landscapes on home, school and public property
- Sprouting classes
- Choosing healthy foods
 - Selecting specific foods for children who are severely affected by what they eat
 - For students about to enter college/university
- Reading food labels, including understanding what “organic” means (this extends to reading in general when literacy levels are very low)
- Budgeting to allow for healthy, local foods
- How to use a whole animal so there are no “leftover” or “other” parts that get wasted
- Foraging / wild food gathering – “pioneer skills”
 - What can be found where
 - How to know what is edible
- Butchering / cutting meat
- Learning how to eat seasonally, developing food tastes and flavour profiles
- Understanding the regulations that affect the relevant aspects of the food system

Some specific populations are identified as well for skill development. It was suggested that restaurateurs needed to develop better skills in offering vegan menu items and physicians need to better understand nutrition.

As to why particular skills are lacking, people most often identify that many skills are not being passed down from generation to generation. The removal of home economics from the school curriculum is also named as a source of the problem; however a few mention that parents should not expect schools to be teaching their children these basic life skills. Parents not role modeling skills in their habits also is reported as contributing to a reduced likelihood that children will learn them for themselves.

b) Where is the Most Food Waste?

The most commonly mentioned source of waste is in institutional settings such as schools, hospitals, and long term care facilities with restaurants and grocery stores being very close seconds. Fast food restaurants are named more often than other types. The produce trimmings in grocery stores are pinpointed as a source of waste which is unnecessary because people would use these. The expiration dates on grocery store foods are thought to result in prematurely throwing things out in a lot of cases. Internal/corporate policies and procedures might lead to unnecessary waste. For example, anecdotally, someone reports that grocery stores throw out tomato vines if there are not six tomatoes present.

Other sources include farmers who plant more crops than they can use. This is felt to be more prevalent on industrialized farms than smaller sustainable operations. Homes where food goes bad before it is eaten or when leftovers do not get used are also mentioned as “culprits”. As an extension of the home, those working in schools report a great deal of waste associated with

school and camp lunches as well as in milk and breakfast/snack programs. The waste associated with food packaging is also flagged as a significant issue.

People did offer suggestions as to why the waste was occurring:

- Restaurants and businesses can't get green bin pick-up and there is a lack of "second harvest" type programs.
- Much of the food is of poor quality so people don't want to eat it.
- There are not enough gleaning and other food recovery programs in place.
- There is no process in place for restaurants and other places to be accountable for their waste.
- Many regulations restrict how leftover food can be re-distributed from restaurants and grocery stores, among others.
- There is a negative "social profile" when people buy discounted food in the supermarket, which means more goes to waste.
- Composting is not common practice. It is often actively discouraged in rural areas because of wildlife.
- We are generally a more disposable society on many fronts, including food, unlike the Depression era when everything was used.
- People go shopping infrequently when they have to travel out of town to do so. Consequently, they often stock up and cannot eat all the food before it spoils.
- There is a lack of places to effectively store food, such as home or community-based root cellars.

This discussion reinforced previous conversations on areas of concern, particularly a lack of storage for food once harvested. Work to rectify this situation would not only reduce waste but also extend the "eating" season. Similarly, the discussion on food waste reinforces the feeling that some of the regulations governing the food system, such as restaurants not being eligible for green box pick-ups, could use updating.

3.8 Food and Culture

This area of discussion in the consultation design was referred to as "Food Value" and attempted to discover three things: How does food contribute to the local quality of life? How is food celebrated in a variety of settings? How important are cultural heritage and indigenous food and associated rights? Of all the areas of discussion undertaken during the consultations this was the one that required that most prompting from the facilitators to encourage discussion. However, once the conversations got started, they tended to flow well.

a) How Food Contributes to the Quality of Life in Communities?

There were many different interpretations of this question across the five consultations. Several of the comments generated had already been addressed in other sections of the consultation.

In the broadest of terms, better food means better health and this has implications on almost everyone in the community and on many sectors, including healthcare, where costs should be reduced as health improves. One describes it this way: “good wholesome food will be the new medicine”. Other connections between food and health are made:

- There is a feeling that, when people increase their food growing and preparing skills and see the results as well as learning more, that will help build confidence, empowerment, celebration, and pleasure in feasting together.
- Improved food in local institutions such as long term care facilities will contribute greatly to the improved health of the people there. People might actually heal faster. In general, as procurement procedures improve in institutions such as hospitals and schools in addition to the LTC facilities, everyone will benefit. It is recognized that food budgets in these institutions would need to rise if food quality is to improve.
- The relationship between food and the optimum growth and development of children has long been acknowledged. Good nutrition early in life is a major factor in determining the quality of life from that point on, both physically and mentally.

There is a social aspect to the quality of life that many explored. This includes connecting with family and friends, a sense of satisfaction in taking care of and responsibility for others, a sense of community. One describes gathering around food often being the only event in the course of a week that brings people together (at home or at work or other community networks). Others describe food as providing the opportunity to meet with and work with people, to share knowledge and generally improve the outlook on life, clarity of thought and improved energy in the community. Food is identified to often be the centre of family gatherings and when a party of some kind is being planned, food is often one of the first considerations. This concept is explored in more depth in the next section on Celebrations.

With respect to other aspects of the food system, the connection is made to many parts of life. For instance, community gardens link to environmental discussions, including the chance to teach children. Food also gives the opportunity to share knowledge and enhance learning, another aspect of life’s quality, regarding many things such as hunting, preserving, and alternative farming methods such as hydroponics. Economic health is part of what brings quality of life to a community. The potential of the food system to contribute significantly to the Muskoka economy is mentioned by many. The untapped potential of eco/agri tourism is but one example. From another perspective, healthier people are healthier employees who in turn are more productive, thereby leading to a healthier community.

"My kids would never think of throwing away a vegetable we've grown but don't think twice about doing so with store bought ones."

"Knowing that your pantry and root cellar are full and that you can provide adequately for the nutritional needs of your family brings with it a peace of mind that, in turn, promotes positive mental health". In a society where mental health concerns are growing exponentially, this aspect of quality of life cannot be underestimated. Socialization, described earlier, is identified as a strong contributor to a positive state of mind.

b) How is Food Celebrated in Workplaces, Homes, Schools and Elsewhere?

The most commonly referenced setting for celebration is the home with the second being the community in places such as festivals and restaurants. Several feel so strongly about this particular aspect that "food IS celebration" is the everyday way of approaching things. Many specific examples of celebratory practices are shared:

- Large family gatherings such as Thanksgiving and Christmas where the family meal is often one of the highlights of the gathering. The rituals associated with these meals are passed down through the generations.
- Food booths at events and festivals.
- Meals at spiritual celebrations with faith communities.
- Community programs such as community kitchens, hot lunch programs, meals for those not able to get out, communal dining, canning workshops, Dinner with Dads where food is central to the initiative.
- Family outings to the market or berry picking to celebrate both the seasons and the harvest.
- Group preparation of food.
- Community, family or workplace potlucks.
- Multi-cultural celebrations, which often have a religious/spiritual purpose.

"When you break bread with people you have made an agreement to peace."

Specific to the workplace setting, it is noted that some organizations (such as the Early Years Centre in Gravenhurst) have policies requiring local foods to be used in on-site events and programs that many others could emulate, as it does not appear there are many of these in place in Muskoka. The example of a workplace birthday celebration is shared where a "box store" cake was brought in that no one wanted and it ended up going to waste.

Emotional connections to food are identified as an important part of celebrations. These connections can influence confidence, empowerment, and attachment to the earth as well as an enhanced sense of care for the environment. It is noted that these celebratory moments often give pause for thought, and sometimes action, for those not able to celebrate food because of their life situation.

c) The Importance of Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Foods and Rights in Muskoka

In terms of *what* was considered to be of cultural importance, the suggestions are divided into two categories: those of significance from a heritage perspective and those more related to the

indigenous foods. In some cases the comments could have been put in either or both categories so it is recommended that the points be considered altogether.

Heritage-related Importance	Indigenous-related Importance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many recall the booming dairy business of the 1960's when farmers were flourishing from the revenues • Muskoka used to be known for its lamb because of, in part, the great pastureland where the soil is so shallow • Preserving, canning, drying practices that are no longer being passed down through the generations • Don't allow GMO's in Muskoka – part of the future that is not wanted • Cooking skills have been lost in this first "fast food" generation • There are heritage varieties of food present – standard root stock versus smaller root stock – 100 year old apple trees present despite those who think "you can't grow apples in Muskoka" • Farmers are not held in the same high regard they once were; farming is not seen as a career to aspire to • There is a definite lack of foods in the area from heritages other than Canadian • Returning to some older practices might prove to be worthwhile, such as the use of grey water (wastewater generated from domestic activities such as laundry, dishwashing and bathing, which can be recycled on-site for such things as landscape irrigation) for watering purposes and the planting of hedgerows to limit runoff • People are respectful when there is a family history, such as people hunting for generations and preserving what they hunt as well as the area, for their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maple syrup and berries • Hunting, fishing & gathering are key but are becoming a dying art as a primary food source (still popular as sport) • There is a low value placed on wild meat • Trade/barter system for hunted meats and other products • No longer known what the winter-hardy plants are • Programs such as bringing an Aboriginal worker into the schools in MacTier are helping children to understand this key element of the community • Many of the indigenous plants and trees have been lost due to development and natural attrition without having been replanted

Other comments focus on *why* these aspects are important. Indigenous food culture is identified as a strong builder of the economy. Indigenous foods tend to be those that are grown locally anyways so this focus is critical to maintaining a local, sustainable, sovereign food system. With respect to the heritage aspect, without an historical component passed through the generations,

farming and cooking skills will be lost. This is felt to have already occurred to a large degree with the young people of today.

In responding to this overall discussion area, some link this category to the waste discussion, in that if people value food more there would be less waste; people need to feel more connected to food.

3.9 Land & Water

Comments generated in the consultations related to this topic were also raised in several other sections of the consultations.

a) Feelings about Muskoka Land Use Now and in the Future

People were asked how they felt about how land was being used now and planned for in the future, especially as it relates to the effect on the local food system.

"Look to the past to find solutions for the future."

Feelings generally run high on this topic from several perspectives. Overwhelmingly, the need is expressed to guard and support agricultural land use and that broad community input is necessary to accomplish this. A much larger percentage of the population needs to become aware of the critical issues facing the local food system and become actively involved in advocating for change. Specific concerns voiced included, in rank order of frequency:

- Muskoka has generally lower wages but higher land prices that make it very difficult to expand, and in some cases maintain, farming. This will become an issue of increasing impact as farmers retire in greater numbers in the next decade and younger farmers will not be able to afford to replace them. The only way for a current farmer to retire is to sell their land for as good a price as possible. Muskoka farmland is not attractive enough to bring people from outside the community and depending on its location, may not be attractive to developers for residential or tourism purposes either. There is a very real possibility that a lot of the current farmland will lie fallow, if not sold for development. One farmer participating in the consultations shares that he will have no problem selling his farm as he has had a great deal of interest shown already.
- There is increasing pressure from quarries to take over farmland as they want to build close to ground water that currently supports the farmland.
- Muskoka is not taking advantage of modern technologies that allow farming to occur virtually anywhere. For instance, land, particularly in more urban areas with vacant buildings, can be used for vertical growing.
- People do not recognize land for the intrinsic value it holds but, rather, see it as a resource, often to be exploited.
- Runoff from livestock operations is a concern voiced by a few as local waterways are prolific and they are linked to groundwater throughout the area.

- Some feel there are limits to what food can be produced in Muskoka because of the soil types. However, others are quite optimistic about new technologies and the opportunities for almost anything to grow in the area.
- The significant amount of Crown land in Muskoka, which will always remain as that, limits the potential for farmland growth.
- Pesticides, fertilizers and poorly maintained septic systems are identified as concerns not only for land but water quality as well. This extends to avoiding the use of road salt near the water. A few mention concerns with the allowance for Hydro to use chemicals in some instances.

b) Protecting Muskoka's Agricultural Farmland and Water

When asked about how to protect the agricultural farmland and water in Muskoka, strong feelings regarding the importance of this arise in all consultations. Details include:

"The only way to keep our farmland as farmland is to put farmers on the land."

- Urban growth is seen as "reckless" with no long-term thought given by planners (e.g., recent growth in Bracebridge). The recent industrial and commercial growth does not support the local food system, and in fact, many feel it is doing much more harm than good.
- Agricultural land, because it is relatively scarce, should not have anything else built on it.
- Housing developments are not as sustainable as business development and the associated job creation.
- The Ryerson Muskoka Food Shed Report is identified as "brilliant" but planners were not on board. This needs to be re-visited. Governments should be held accountable for follow-up on work such as this.
- Planners at both the upper and lower tiers of government need to be involved in the proactive and sustainable preservation of farmland.
- Planning activities need to involve significant input from the community at every stage.
- There is a lot of unused land that could be farmed and if not protected for this purpose it may disappear to development endeavours.
- "Ribbon development" (or the building of houses along key transportation routes in a community) is a concern because of the number of these in Muskoka around lakes in order to access water for residential and recreational purposes. These do not appear to be connected to any long term plan for the District. A plan to protect this waterfront property should be put in place.

Other topics relate to the protection of the local water are raised as well. Participants are concerned about the quality of the fish in the local water as well as a local pipe factory which is a big concern because of toxic chemicals going into the water. The water in front of the

shoreline that provides spawning areas, cover, and a nursery habitat is also identified by a few as being in need of protection. Enforcement of regulations to keep the water clean and limit the number of fish caught is felt to be much stronger in the summer with the presence of the Township by-law officers, the OPP and MNR personnel. Attention paid the other 10 months of the year is felt to be almost non-existent. Long term planning regarding the protection of the Muskoka waterways seems to be a particular gap to many people. This extends to the building of residences, including cottages that result in fewer trees, erosion and damage to the shoreline, then the water. The issue of fluoride being added to the water is also raised. Some think it to be a toxic substance that should be banned as it has been in some places in Europe.

The groundwater in the bedrock is also cause for concern by some because it doesn't re-charge. Once the aquifer is depleted, it does not come back so efforts are necessary to protect the aquifer. This would include such things as filling in swamp areas that clean and renew water. No further clarification or detail was available on this point.

There is some disagreement among participants in at least one consultation regarding water quality. MNR tests report Muskoka water as being one of the highest quality waters in Ontario while others disagree, citing high phosphate levels.

From a positive perspective, several educational initiatives are described that are teaching children to be respectful and protective of the local water system to the point that some remark that their children know more about this than their parents. Also on a positive note, water quality is felt to be protected to some degree because there are no hog farms, industrial farms or monoculture (those that cultivate a single crop) farms.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MUSKOKA FOOD CHARTER

Overall, there are no significant differences across the five locations of the consultations in terms of the issues raised. However, it is identified by many that Muskoka is quite different from other areas of the province, largely due to the strong influence of the tourists and seasonal residents. This dichotomy is central to many discussions.

Muskoka is described as a unique community with a year round population that is very low in number, but a large summer population with a strong voice. There are areas of contention, different agendas for different groups in the region. It will be important to include the voice of seasonal residents in the development of the food charter. Primarily due to the time of year in which the consultations were held, the cottager voice was not present.

4.1 Suggestions From Consultation Participants

Although there wasn't a specific question asked during the consultations, there were comments captured that participants offered in terms of some cautions and suggestions regarding a potential food charter:

- Ensure it doesn't restrict farmers and local food producers.
- It must have an equal agricultural component to a food element.
- Ensure it isn't seen as a government program telling people how to use their land.
- The food system is already too over-controlled and regulated with too much government involvement.
- Ensure it represents a community movement and not a competition.
- It must reflect what is going on in Muskoka.
- Seasonal residents need to be involved in creating the charter. They have powerful voices with policy-makers and will be more likely to support the charter if they have been involved in creating it.
- Host a different consultation with discussion around food security and food sovereignty, as this could help shape the direction of the charter.
- Include something in the charter around all workers being treated fairly/value of all jobs.

4.2 Recommended Food Charter Elements Based on Consultation Content

The major themes generated through the consultations lead to the identification of the following elements for consideration in a Muskoka food charter.

a) Improve Access to Local, Healthy Food for All

Examine the following aspects of the food system as they relate to their impact on access to food:

- cost of local food
- availability of several types of local foods altogether in accessible locations throughout Muskoka, such as farmers' markets and grocery stores
- availability of locally produced food year-round
- the quality of fresh foods, whether locally produced or not, in areas with limited options for purchasing food
- availability of a complete range of locally produced foods with particular attention to the identified gaps of dairy, beef and grain products
- storage facilities for foods post-harvest
- the increasing availability of convenience foods.

b) Protect Muskoka Farmland and Water

Examine the following aspects of the food system as they relate to their impact on the quantity and quality of a sustainable Muskoka environment:

- lack of a long-term, sustainable plan for a food system
- lack of trained new farmers to replace those soon to retire
- unused land that could be made available to interested farmers
- the apparently shelved Ryerson Muskoka Food Shed Report.

c) Develop Food Skills

Examine the following aspects of the food system as they relate to their impact on the development of skills:

- preserving foods
- food preparation, especially in children
- gardening/farming skills for home, community gardens and small scale farming
- the ability to select healthy food options.

d) Establish Supportive Regulations

Examine the following aspects of the food system as they relate to their impact on the regulations and legislation that affect food in Muskoka:

- disposal of food waste from restaurants and institutions
- labeling of local foods to identify them as such
- labeling of all foods to identify pesticides used.

e) Contribute to a Strengthened Economy through a Sustainable Food System

Examine the following aspects of the food system as they relate to their impact on the local economy in Muskoka:

- agri- and culinary-tourism potential
- lack of understanding in the general public about the connection between food and the local economy
- employment challenges in the District related to seasonal work, low pay and immigrant workers
- food waste.

f) Support People in Making Healthy Food Choices

Examine the following aspects of the food system as they relate to their impact on the eating habits of people in Muskoka:

- knowledge about what healthy food is
- the other components of the food charter that are all in support of healthy eating.

APPENDICES

A: Consultation Promotional Tools



food charter
-muskoka life ad & po



GazetteHalfPageAd.
pdf



HuntsvilleWebsite.pdf

B: Design for Muskoka Consultations



Detailed Design for
Report.docx

C: Consultation Slides



Consultation
Slides.pptx



food charter ppt
(2).pptx

D: Muskoka Food Consultation Questions



Muskoka Food
Consultation Questior

E: Facilitator Cheat Sheet



Facilitator Cheat
Sheet.docx

F: Raw Data by Consultation



Bracebridge.docx



GeorgianBay.docx



Gravenhurst.docx



Huntsville.docx



Rosseau.docx

G: Raw Data by Question



Muskoka Food
Consultation Compilat

H: Implementation Ideas

Across the group discussions at the five consultations there were many suggestions made for specific actions that could be taken to address the various issues and concerns raised. They have been organized according to the five action strategies of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion², a universally accepted standard framework: Developing Personal Skills, Strengthening Community Action, Creating Supportive Environments, Building Healthy Public Policy and Re-Orienting Health Services. Some suggestions could have fit in more than one strategy so have only been included once in what seemed to the one of best fit. These ideas were not vetted in any way but could serve as starting points for discussion in the future.

STRATEGY	IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS
Developing Personal Skills	<p>This is the strategy with the greatest number of suggestions, in part because of some of the questions posed during the consultations regarding skills. This area includes actions aimed at increasing people’s awareness and knowledge as precursors to being able to develop skills. The skills are organized into three themes: Raising Awareness, Mentoring and Training & Resources.</p> <p><u>RAISING AWARENESS:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more public education of value of eating local / growing own • Re-introduce lost skills (e.g., knowledge around hunting/foraging/things people can eat in their backyard) • Teach tourists to eat local too • Implement a “Buy Local” campaign that mirrors the effectiveness of fair trade and good marketing used by coffee shops • Teach people how to create backyard gardens – create a way to have people share knowledge • Show people how to vermicompost (compost composed of organic materials derived from plant and animal matter that has decomposed) • Host a district-wide potluck tour to get people out and aware as well as having a time to celebrate • Create a local food map of the Region to show what local foods are available where and when; ensure this resource is available for public and businesses • Utilize high school cafeterias and kitchens for a variety of workshops during times when schools are closed • Educate people regarding the relationship of food to the local economy • Teach people about the ripeness of foods and how to use them at different stages • Provide more education about local agricultural heritage <p><u>MENTORING:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mentoring program is needed through the District • Need to be more imaginative and encourage innovation in ways to engage people who want to begin farming (e.g., create an apprentice program with

² Retrieved from the World Health Organization at: <http://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/>

STRATEGY	IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS
	<p>farmers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start edible schoolyard programs (or a sprouting program) so kids learn to cook/cut/chop and are exposed to new foods • Plant the seed early for kids to consider farming as a career • Send information out to teachers to try and have involvement from all schools • Reintroduce gardens/education of where food comes from (for students in schools) • Create "eaters" <p><u>TRAINING & RESOURCES:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide cookbooks (on-line and hard copy) • Provide culinary training • Access skill / educational information on-line • Provide health and safety training for those helping with cooking/food skills classes • Provide more workshops on canning, preserving, etc. • Offer a local version of "FarmLink" that connects those who are looking for farmland with those who have it available • Brand Muskoka as the place where we grow our own • Create food classifieds for Muskoka (i.e., a section in the back of the Yellow Pages – the "Green Pages" – or post on the internet) to share locations of farms, farmers, food artisans, etc. • Provide workshops on how to make organic cooking more interesting and find volunteers to teach this • Teach people how to make things out of what's left in the fridge • Need a big composting facility (because restaurants can't get green-bin pick-up) • Educate people on how to use more food so there is less waste. This will need to include the redefinition of waste. • Provide community co-op storage and/or freezer facilities • Facilitate neighbour to neighbour sharing when food is starting to go bad or overbought or make a soup and take it to someone you know
Strengthening Community Action	<p>This area describes ways in which citizens help themselves, usually as part of some type of collective action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form farming co-ops • Create neighbourhood food hubs or several larger ones across the District • Create a community farm with shared equipment and costs • Form a farming / growing co-op to "get around" some regulations • Co-operative gardens could enable people to contribute and share costs (e.g., if one person had a large piece of land) • Create a local farmers' association • Showcase the benefits of farmers' markets to the community and producers • Muskoka is already a strong brand in and of itself. Build on this platform with local food • Encourage people to ask more questions of vendors as to where their food

STRATEGY	IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS
	<p>comes from and then not buying if not local</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create food hubs/co-operatives to enhance local access to food • Speak with other organized community groups (e.g., at a luncheon) • Conduct more community dinners for seniors / potlucks / celebrations • There is a business opportunity in gathering restaurant food waste and composting it • Engage buses or volunteer drivers to take seniors/shut-ins to the food producers on a monthly basis • Create a central "food" web site, perhaps around a food charter, to house core documents (e.g., Ryerson Muskoka Food Shed Report)
<p>Creating Supportive Environments</p>	<p>This is the most prolific of the areas for ideas, which are organized in themes: Availability, Community Sharing, Resources, Programs, Tourism</p> <p><u>AVAILABILITY</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider mobile markets • Provide local meat available on-line • Provide a dedicated area in local grocery stores and big chain supermarkets to the degree possible, exclusively for local food producers as a way of "getting in" • Pursue discount carts in grocery stores • Implement "Localize" (from Alberta) in grocery stores to provide information to shoppers about supporting local growers • Build a local "brand" wherever possible. Instead of sushi, make the specialty in the restaurant local trout • Offer a card or membership to get lower prices than tourists • Offer a bus to the food bank with specified dates/times • Support businesses in communicating and collaborating around transportation issues through such things as a Food Transportation Board • Create a local agent to bring farmers' produce to farmers' markets (similar to bringing food from the Toronto Food Terminal); use empty buildings to create food hubs • Create a farm gate news hub • Host rotating farm-gate markets • Remove "politics" from vending at farmers' markets • Publicize a map of all farmland in Muskoka and have on a web site • Look at developing a phone number/web site and separate e-mail for the food charter • Utilize the Huntsville Train station as an indoor market • Use urban land to produce food (edible landscape) • Plant the kinds of plants and trees that were indigenous to the region many years ago that flourished naturally • Create a farmers' market in Dwight, Port Severn/Honey Harbour (could partner with Coldwater)

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	<p><u>COMMUNITY SHARING</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more community kitchens (model after the successful one in Port Carling) • Create community gardens (e.g., the community garden in MacTier/ at the Baxter Ward Community Centre which is paired with an after-school program) • Create community root cellar/community food storage – could combine these with community gardens • Create more community events with food/centred around food to help others not eat alone (e.g., host community feasting events such as things such as the food festivals around local indigenous foods such as Cranberry Festival) • Provide waste / leftover plants to community gardens or partner with a farmer / market and let them sell it for the grower • Expired produce could be used to feed animals or use meat for pet food • Create a year-round farmers’ market depot / local food terminal to order and pick-up food • Create more opportunities such as Brooklands Farm where gleaning and harvesting have been opened up for the food bank • Create a Dehydration Centre in the region as drying food preserves nutrition, is cheaper and no freezer needed • Partner agriculture with historic sites to celebrate and provide traditional foods • Communities and organizations need to take over farmland when put up for sale so development is curbed <p><u>PROGRAMS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a registration system for farmers to list land available for farming so that those interested in farming, without the ability to buy their own property, could farm • Put in place a program that allows for green bins to be used in restaurants • Develop a barter/points / Muskoka dollar system / services in exchange for produce (smaller providers could work together)(e.g., eggs and produce in exchange for leasing land) • Investigate other ways of growing than traditional farming such as hydroponics and greenhouses • Develop meal share programs <p><u>RESOURCES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent out root cellars / storage lockers to farmers so they can sell their produce gradually • Use wooden skids for growing vegetables that could be placed on the side of an apartment building (known as lasagna or mulch gardening) • Supply food donation bins for cottages (Cottage Food Drive) • Use hydroponics to extend the growing season • Plant perennial crops (e.g., fruit trees) alongside annual ones such as hay • Enhance agricultural practices to maximize local soil • Look at the major local food gaps in Muskoka and how to fill these (e.g., there

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	<p>is a lack of dairy which could be an interesting idea for a co-operative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the option to access water for free before the fluoridation occurs • Recover the seeds from the Wahta Reserve <p><u>PROGRAMS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put more gleaning and other food recovery programs in place • Promote brown wrap for processing and stay away from the plastics and styrofoam • Encourage program and meeting participants to bring Tupperware to sessions to take home extra food • Create a local food marketing board • Develop a “Support local chefs” campaign • Establish ways to provide donations/share surplus (e.g., with the food bank/shelters; provide waste/leftover plants to community gardens or partner with a farmer/farmers’ market and let them sell it for you) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish a Food Bank program where families could connect/share food privately/in a safe way (e.g., those looking to donate food and those looking to take food) • Provide recipes for using local foods • Establish an emergency processing facility (e.g., emergency canning session) • Start growing Muskoka apples <p><u>TOURISM</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more food tourism opportunities • Promote food tourism where both local and tourist communities intersect • Teach tourists to eat local • Provide “Welcome” information to new people to the area that includes where to access local food • Welcome Wagon to provide coupons for local food/local food producers • Stimulate food economy off-season with things such as resorts offering cooking weekends with on-site chef • Increase agri-tourism with things like farm tours • Use products grown here to be used in the production of other locally produced artisanal foods • Increase the number of specialty items available in Gravenhurst on which a full promotional campaign can be launched to increase destination tours
Building Healthy Public Policy	<p>Of the suggestions made in this area, most focus on government policy change, usually at the local level. There are also several who address organizational policies in places such as schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at how public health inspectors can help people with food safety (e.g., canning/preserving food safely) • Advocate for change at the Federal level • Raise the food issues in political arenas • Place and enforce firm controls over pesticides and chemical use (by farmers as well as golf courses, landscapers etc.)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class 3 agricultural land needs to be designated for agriculture • Land-owners, the District and lower-tier governments need to open up the conversation around zoning for agriculture • Policies regarding how many dwellings can be on one property need to be revisited so new farmers can live on properties they are farming along with the land owners • When land is being sold for development, developers should have to “give back” by protecting or ecologically developing other land for the community • Critical to get food systems, including the waterways, addressed in the reviews of Official Plans at District and municipal levels • Engage other groups in efforts to protect land and water, such as the Premier, Minister of Agriculture, Heritage Foundation, Watershed Council, District and Municipal Planners and Government environmental protection staff • Engage the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund that is promoting sustainability • The policies of the Muskoka Heritage Foundation need to be addressed in that they can currently entrust forested land but presently not farmland • Develop a Business Case to protect and re-zone farmland against development. Make the financial as well as the environmental case. • Muskoka needs an environmental farm plan that could be mandatory and/or farms display signs to show compliance • Need set-back limits / requirements for houses and sludge from farms • All townships should have the same by-laws and programs so there is consistency across communities • Politicians need to be educated and converted to supporting different land use practices that take advantage of modern technologies for agricultural practices that allow farming to occur virtually anywhere • Hold governments responsible for documents/projects partnered on (e.g., revisit the agricultural reports prepared for the District of Muskoka by Ryerson (<u>Muskoka Food Shed Report</u>)) • Create a food charter website that could link to reports and assist with advocacy efforts • Land-owners, the District and lower-tier governments need to open up the conversation around zoning for agriculture • Need to look at long-term plans (e.g., 20 years down the road) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Need to start implementing today for the future” • Need a governmental/agency group created • Inform the new Premier of Ontario; invite her to Muskoka and do a presentation • Food should be exempt from certain rules/regulations/taxes • Develop standards of what “local” means • Local food needs to be subsidized, government needs to subsidize small growers for it to be profitable and allow people to grow (e.g., create a tax break when growing food for yourself) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Subsidies for small scale farms, help hire staff, engage the unemployed in production and create an inclusive community (through

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	<p>food production)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Subsidies for new farmers, interest-free loans for infrastructure ○ Provide subsidies for youth to be hired so that they learn and help on farms and in large urban gardens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● District to set up a more organic waste system ● Create allotment gardens at either end of stretches on municipal land ● Protect lands appropriate for agriculture ● Develop a Food Emergency Preparedness strategy ● Implement workplace healthy eating policy, such as the one in place at the Early Years Centre ● Put farmers on a pension system that would allow them to spend time mentoring the next person who will farm their land
Re-Orienting Health Services	<p>This strategy involves shifting typical medical practice to take on a greater health promotion/disease prevention approach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Physicians providing prescriptions for local, fresh foods to encourage use.