

Haliburton Highlands Local Food Coalition 2008 Report

Background

The Haliburton Highlands Local Foods Coalition (HHLFC) was established in March 2008 as a subcommittee of Environment Haliburton. The HHLFC consists of individuals dedicated to foster local food in the Haliburton Highlands. Present HHLFC partners include interested individuals from the Haliburton County Farmers' Association, Environment Haliburton, Health For Life, Haliburton, Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit, and community members.

With HCDC funding HHLFC was able to research the current state of local food in our community and sponsor a public forum. These tasks were accomplished based on community input and the intention of defining how the community could improve current local food conditions.

Research - Individual / Bulk Consumer / Producer Surveys

HHLFC research included surveys of individual consumers (permanent and seasonal residents), bulk consumers (camps, restaurants, retail outlets, and institutions), and local food producers. The individual Consumer Survey suggests the individual consumers are keen to purchase locally produced food and that there is perhaps a greater demand than local producers can currently supply. Bulk Consumer Surveys reveal that many bulk consumers would buy local food provided certain concerns were addressed. Bulk consumers identified a need for consistent quality and quantity as well as delivery services. Another vital factor for bulk consumers is the adherence to food regulations for both selling and processing. Producer surveys suggest that many local producers are aging individuals who grow for friends and family. Most sales appear to be produced from gate sales and freezer orders. In many cases these sales are drawn from an existing customer base with little room for new consumers. Detailed survey results are available from the HHLFC.

Food Forum

In October 2008 approximately 75 community members attended a day long Local Forum hosted by the HHLFC. The forum provided a format for identifying Local Food Issues and possible community based solutions to challenges. The food forum also served as a think tank to generate future goals for the HHLFC. During discussion groups at the forum six key areas became clear. Those areas are Retail, Education, New Farmers, Food Policy/Charter, Community Gardens/Kitchens, and Distribution. In smaller focus groups participants identified opportunities/resources, challenges, possible solutions, identified local issues, and potential actions relating to each of these areas. A detailed "Forum Focus Group Report" is available from the HHLFC.

Key Summary of Forum Focus Groups:

Retail – investigate opportunities to develop a retail outlet in a central location to sell local products. Products need to be in compliance with food safety standards.

Education – on going education in all aspects of local food is required, i.e. saving seeds, planting, harvesting, composting, cooking & preserving.

New Farmers & Land Access – majority of farmers are at retirement age and there is a need to attract new farmers and make farming a viable occupation. Excellent resource is Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training in Ontario (CRAFT), a networking for new farmers.

Food Policy – municipal food policies typically focus on land use, planning, agriculture, emergency food distribution, food retail access, community health, waste management and community economic development.

Community Gardens & Kitchens – to provide access to gardening and build on existing programs in the community.

Distribution – investigate different concepts of distributing and accessing local produce, i.e. Wendy's Mobile Market in Kingston area or Kawartha Ecological Growers model, Jean & Godfrey Tyler and other farmer's expertise to share. Using the results of the surveys and input from the forum, the HHLFC has developed a preliminary list of what community members can do to support the local food movement. These results also provided community guidance to the HHLFC for immediate future direction.

What can we do?

We all need to work together and do our piece to move the local food issues forward.

Farmers:

- Promote your goods on Haliburton Fresh website www.haliburtonfresh.com (**site no longer active**).
- Share your expertise with others
- Become a member of the Haliburton Farmers Association
- Contact local restaurants and resorts to keep your products in the local food stream

General Public:

- Educate yourself about local food issues, find out where the food you eat is coming from
- Get involved or start a community garden and or community kitchen. Call the health unit for more information or to get help in getting starting.
- If you have gardening skills become a mentor
- Buy local whenever possible. Buying foods from local farms supports the local economy and helps keep them in business. It also helps to protect farmland and creates local jobs.
- Check out www.haliburtonfresh.com (**site no longer active**).

- Eat in season as much as possible
- Check out www.foodland.gov.on.ca/english/availability.html
- If you have a garden consider selling or trading extras
- If you have never gardened before start small and grow herbs or one vegetable
- Encourage governments to provide the supports that promote sustainable farming practices
- Consider buying local food, beverages etc. as gifts
- Go to a Farmers' Market such as the markets in Kinmount or Tory Hill in the summer months
- Attend educational events on growing, storing, preserving, composting food.
- Retail (Restaurants/ Resorts/ Grocery Outlets/ Schools/Hospitals)
- Host a food festival or fundraiser with a local food theme
- Investigate buying local

Municipalities:

- Support existing farmers and assist in attracting new farmers
- Support Community Garden & Community Kitchen initiatives
- Support Local Food Charter
- Investigate composting at the dump
- Support farmers' markets

HHLFC:

- Develop an information hub to share, promote local food issue, to act as a convener bringing people, ideas and resources together
- Research possible funds to develop an information hub tool

Summary

As our 2008 food forum keynote speaker, Andrew McCann, so eloquently stated... to move the local food issues forward we need to leave our egos at the door and work together as Haliburton County is well known for doing. These are exciting times with lots of opportunities & changing ideas. The common denominator is that we are all eaters so let's keep the momentum!