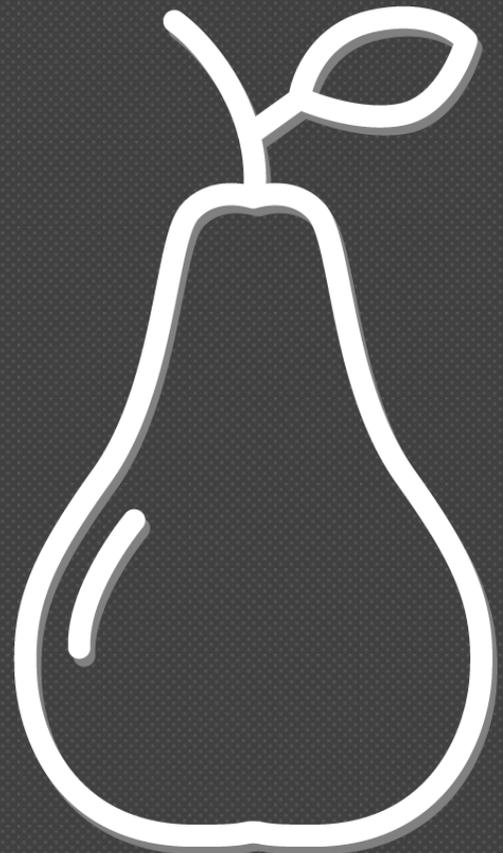


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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A community food assessment (CFA) is a participatory and collaborative process engaged in by members of a community who are interested in exploring their area's food system strengths and needs. The purpose of a CFA is to gather the information needed to picture the whole food system, and then to work towards increasing community *food sovereignty* (see below) by using this information to inform decision-making around the policies and practices that define the local food system.

The strategies used to gather the information for a CFA include: *exploring* the resources and assets in a community; *envisioning* what a local, healthy, and sustainable food system could look like, *identifying* food system areas to cultivate; *developing* work plans around priority action items; and then *implementing* action plans that include *measurements* for success.⁶ Community food assessments can result in many benefits to the community, such as greater awareness and understanding of food-related issues, addressing gaps in the community food security system, and boosting sustainability of the community food system.⁷

In February 2014, the Middlesex-London community came together at a community food forum—hosted by the London Community Foundation, City of London, and Middlesex-London Health Unit—to discuss the potential to form a local food policy council. After conducting research into various organizational models for a local food policy council, the community decided that a community food assessment was a natural next step, which would inform future community action planning. In April 2015, the London Food Bank—with the support of the London Community Foundation, City of London, and Middlesex-London Health Unit, initiated a community food assessment process on behalf of the Middlesex-London community. The “Middlesex-London Community Food Assessment Report” is the outcome of this process.

A community is said to be food secure “...when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.⁸ This definition of food security was built upon three pillars—food availability, food access, and food use; however, the “Five A’s of Food Security,” is one of the most universally accessible understandings of the concept. The five A’s are: availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability, and agency (i.e. the policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security).⁹ However, for food security to be realized by a community, community members must be able to control the policies that govern the production and distribution of the food they eat. This is called *food sovereignty*. “Food

⁶ Sue Ross and Zena Simces, *Community Food Assessment Guide*, B.C. Provincial Health Services Authority, March 2008, Print, at p. 5.

⁷ Sue Ross and Zena Simces, *Community Food Assessment Guide*, B.C. Provincial Health Services Authority, March 2008, Print, at p. 6.

⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action*, November 13, 1996, Web, at <http://www.fao.org/wfs/>.

⁹ Ryerson University, Centre for Studies in Food Security, “The Five A’s of Food Security,” 2016, Web, <http://www.ryerson.ca/foodsecurity/our-approach.html>.

sovereignty is 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.”¹⁰ Food sovereignty is defined by seven pillars: food for people, building knowledge and skills, working with nature, valuing food providers, localizing food systems, putting control locally, and recognizing food as sacred.¹¹ A community food assessment can help a potential food policy group to make decisions on which pillars should be prioritized and what actions can be taken towards creating a healthier and more sustainable local food system.

The Middlesex-London community food assessment was a participatory and collaborative process that engaged stakeholders from across the food system. The approach used for the CFA allowed for stakeholders to share their vision for Middlesex-London’s food system and work together to on plans for future actions towards achieving this vision. The opportunity to build upon this assessment with the co-construction of a local food policy council grounds the main recommendations below.

The Middlesex-London region is the geographical focus for this community food assessment. This includes eight municipalities—Newbury, Southwest Middlesex, Strathroy-Caradoc, Thames Centre, Middlesex Centre, North Middlesex, Adelaide Metcalfe, and Lucan Biddulph—three First Nations reserves within the census division, and the City of London.

The main objective of the Middlesex-London community food assessment was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the local food system that would inform recommendations for proposed community action. Three phases defined the process used to achieve this objective: a review of existing resources and assets through an environmental scan, participatory research and stakeholder engagement, and the writing of a community food assessment report.

A framework consisting of 10 food system categories, numerous subcategories, and approximately 300 indicators, was used to structure the environmental scan. This framework is further explained below. The environmental scan collected data from a number of different sources, which the Community Food Assessment Implementation Team assisted in collecting.

A number of different activities defined the community engagement process that took place throughout the community food assessment. First, 30 key informant interviews with individuals from the following groups: local food organizations; community development offices; emergency food agencies; municipal and provincial governments; growers and producers; processors and distributors; educators and investors.

¹⁰ International Forum for Food Sovereignty, *Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty*, Nyéléni 2007, February 27, 2007.

¹¹ Food Secure Canada, “What is Food Sovereignty,” 2014, Web, at <http://foodsecurecanada.org/who-we-are/what-food-sovereignty>.

Second, a broad community survey was used to engage 756 members of the community. The survey captured their thoughts on the Middlesex-London food system and determined which areas they felt were most important for food system change. When the scales for the different levels of importance were weighted (where “strongly disagree” is rated the lowest and “strongly agree” is rated the highest) the statements that received the most support from survey respondents follow below.

It is important that,

- Healthy food is affordable for everyone in Middlesex-London;
- Children, youth, and young adults learn about food and the food system;
- Food-related health problems are prevented in Middlesex-London; and
- As local farmers get older, others are supported to start farming.

Third, an interactive co-design session saw 42 community members collaborate on the production of a local food system asset map for Middlesex-London. The asset map was reviewed by 22 community members, who then participated in the development of mini plans for transforming Middlesex-London’s local food system.

The final phase of the community food assessment project involved the writing of the Middlesex-London Community Food Assessment Report, which was submitted to the Middlesex-London Community Food Assessment Implementation Team, and reviewed by several key members of the Steering Committee before being finalized.

The ten food system categories corresponding to the framework mentioned above include the following: population statistics; food production; food access and distribution; food purchasing and consumption; food education, knowledge and literacy; food waste management; food policy and advocacy; risk management and food safety; food innovation and technology; and food funding, finance and investment. These categories defined the scope of the Middlesex-London community food assessment. They are also used to structure this report. Below is a short summary of the information provided in each of the ten categories, including some of the opportunities for change identified during the assessment.

- **Population statistics** provides an overview of who is vulnerable to and affected by food insecurity, the many health issues linked to or resulting from the current food system, and the economic conditions or realities within the area that limit peoples access to healthy food. An opportunity for change within this area is to develop capacity within people to become more food secure by increasing their food literacy skills through education and awareness initiatives, and further then support them by making fresh local food more accessible.
- **Food production** provides an overview of local agriculture in the area, an account of sustainable or alternative food production and activity in local and community-based food

production, which includes smaller-scale, alternative or non-traditional forms of food production. One opportunity for change that was identified is to support small-scale agriculture, including urban agriculture, through working with the existing agricultural community to see knowledge transferred to new farmers and young generations.

- **Food access and distribution** provides an overview of food access points in Middlesex-London, the availability of local food; and an overview of the food distribution system in the area. An opportunity for change identified in the assessment is the building of local food processing and distribution capacity through the development of infrastructure in the middle of the supply chain, such as a food hub or mobile processing solution.
- **Food purchasing and consumption** provides an account of the purchasing behaviour of local, healthy, sustainable food from the standpoint of food service, food retail, public institutions and the general public, an account of general food purchasing behaviour, an overview of the consumption of local food in the area and of eating habits of the general population and by subpopulation. Growing both awareness and knowledge about healthy local food, through food literacy initiatives and marketing campaigns, is one opportunity to create positive change in food purchasing and consumption in Middlesex-London.
- **Food education, knowledge and literacy** provides an overview of the food education work taking place in Middlesex-London, education programs that focus on food education, and public knowledge and opinions about healthy, local and sustainable food in the area. An opportunity for change in this area is to grow food literacy across Middlesex-London amongst children, youth and young adults, both inside and outside the school system.
- **Food waste management** assesses the different types of waste across the food value chain, impacts of this food waste, different types of food waste in Middlesex-London, from producer-to-consumer, initiatives and efforts that have been made to reduce food waste in the local community, and the effectiveness of current efforts to reduce food system waste. One opportunity for change in food waste management in Middlesex-London is to reduce food waste throughout the food system using an approach that sees all stakeholders engaged, and that is supported by policy.
- **Food policy and advocacy** provides an overview of the food policies that currently exist in Middlesex-London, including: policies which support the development of a local sustainable food system, local food policies that have attained council support, and advocacy efforts in the area related to food security, food democracy and/or food sovereignty. Increasing advocacy efforts to challenge policies that do not support the local food system and working towards innovative policy change that support local food system development are complementary opportunities that were identified as part of this assessment.
- **Risk management and food safety** focuses on food safety risk management plans and food safety risks within the local food system as well as aims to identify what food system risk

management plans are in place and the food safety risks associated with these plans. The opportunity for change in this area is to: first, think broadly about risk management and all the factors that affect the availability of safe, nutritious and local food, and then, apply this knowledge to risk management and food safety activity in Middlesex-London.

- **Food innovation and technology** determines the level of innovation within the local food system and identifies initiatives where technology is being developed and utilized to enhance the local sustainable food system, as well as gives an overview of innovative programming. One opportunity for change is to develop and implement a regional brand that showcases the food that is grown, raised, harvested or produced in Middlesex-London.
- **Food funding, finance and investment** provides an overview of the funding available for community-based food system initiatives in Middlesex-London and provides a broad overview of investment, funding and financing options available to food system businesses and projects in the area. Working together to secure resources to support local food businesses and community-based food system activities is a big opportunity for change in this area.

The opportunities for change noted above for each area within the food system framework are samples of the many discovered during the community food assessment process. The opportunities for change are located within specific areas to cultivate in Middlesex-London. A cultivation area is an identifiable area within a local food system where improvement can be made, which can be explored by the community towards creating the change they want to see. In total, 14 areas to cultivate were identified as part of the community food assessment: food literacy, food waste reduction, small-scale agriculture and distribution, local food processing and distribution, young and new farmers, rural-urban connection, emergency food access, food policy, sustainable production, urban agriculture, health and wellness, land protection, food accessibility, and public media campaigning.

During the community action planning stage of the CFA, community members agreed on 4 cultivation areas to plan future action around. A working group assigned to each area then identified 3 potential community-based initiatives to be voted on. Each working group then developed a mini work plan for the top initiatives. Goals or objectives, steps to be taken, needed resources, assets to leverage, and measures of success were all outlined. Below is a list of the four cultivation areas and the top initiative chosen by stakeholders:

- **Food waste reduction:** Conduct an exercise to determine how much food waste there is in Middlesex-London.
- **Food literacy:** Establish a food literacy working group that develops a common food literacy message and filters it out to residents through networks and media to residents.
- **Food processing and distribution:** Enact a municipal policy by-law mandating public institutions to purchase a designated percentage of local food.

- **Small-scale agriculture production:** Develop a local food hub to manage logistics, and storage.

Many important findings and much analysis is contained in this community food assessment report; 38 specific areas were identified for further research. These areas have been grouped together under the corresponding categories in the food system framework in Section 13.

In addition to conducting research into the areas identified, and further developing the work plans towards implementing direct action, there are a number of initiatives that the community can work on to support a stronger, more sustainable food system. The recommendations provided throughout Sections 2-11 of this report have been combined in a simple chart, found in Section 13. The topics include: innovative food policy; food funding and investment; urban agriculture; supporting farmers; local food procurement; infrastructure development; food waste, community programming; and food literacy. An additional theme has been created for recommendations that do not fall within these themes.

The Middlesex-London Community Food Assessment confirms the following: there is a diversity of food system stakeholders and a breadth of food system activity in the area; the number of cultivation areas and amount of opportunity is great; and the degree of community engagement and local food system momentum is very high. As a result, the overarching recommendation is *for Middlesex-London food system stakeholders to proceed with the establishment of a food policy council*. A food policy council will provide an organized platform to engage stakeholders in an on-going discussion about and decision-making around the most appropriate initiatives and necessary resources required to drive food system change in Middlesex-London.