



TOWARDS A FOOD STRATEGY FOR SASKATOON

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SASKATOON REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN¹

Recommendations

Our assessment has documented many of the factors, organizations, and enterprises already supporting change in the Saskatoon food system. In formulating recommendations and suggestions, our focus is to build on the existing strengths.

1. Our first overarching recommendation is to create a mechanism for ongoing food system action: A Saskatoon Community Food Council.

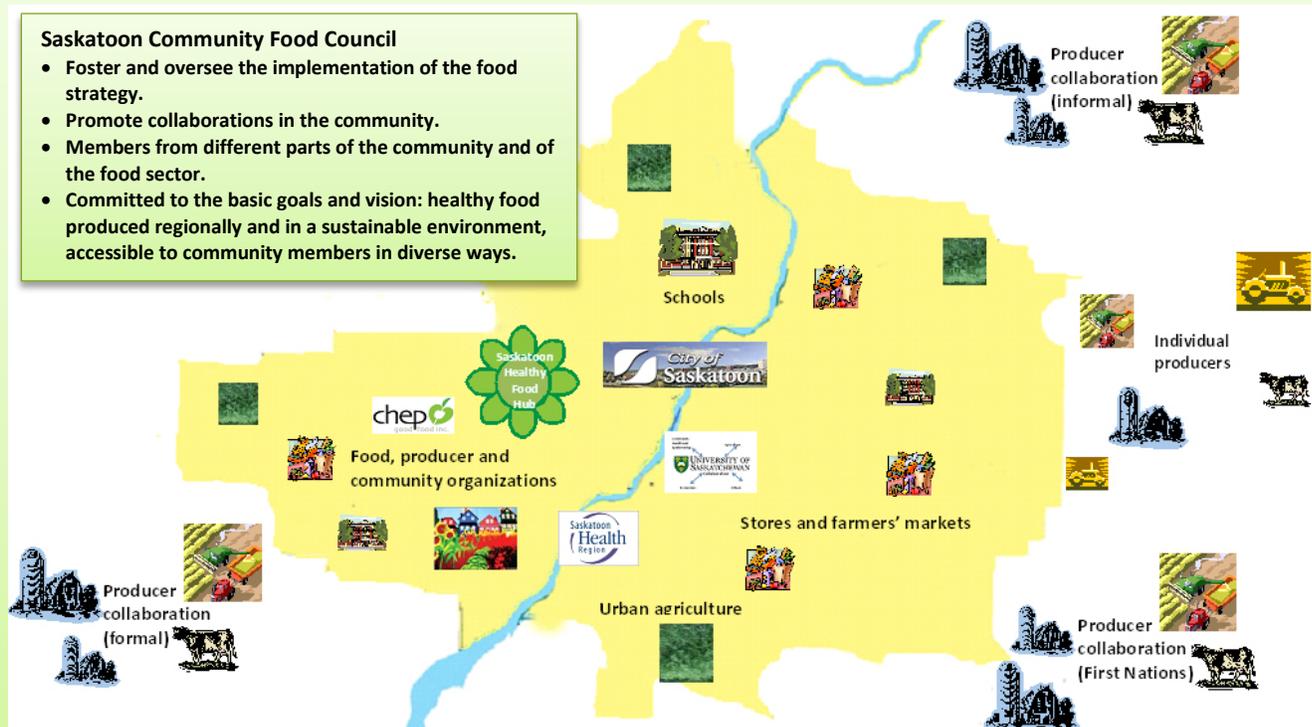
The Council would have members from different parts of the community and of the food sector, all committed to the basic goals and vision. Its purpose would be to foster and oversee the implementation of the food strategy. It would promote collaborations in the community, among and between producers and residents, and their organizations, building on existing strengths.

From the findings, the need emerges for increased collaboration among those involved. Given the nature of the movement's strength, any collaborations that are formed should retain flexibility, openness and responsiveness, but alliances can lead to more effective use of resources with better economies of scale, and improve the potential to leverage additional investment from outside sources. Alliances also enable the delivery of a coherent message for promotion. Based on our discussions in the assessment, we suggest that an explicit commitment to healthy food produced in a sustainable environment, accessible to community members in diverse ways, would be a message consistent with residents' values.

Saskatoon Community Food Council: Foster the food strategy and promote collaboration

Saskatoon Community Food Council

- Foster and oversee the implementation of the food strategy.
- Promote collaborations in the community.
- Members from different parts of the community and of the food sector.
- Committed to the basic goals and vision: healthy food produced regionally and in a sustainable environment, accessible to community members in diverse ways.





In implementing the food strategy, the Council would act on the recommendations we have made in the following areas. Taken as a whole, the recommendations form the basis for a food strategy and corresponding action plan for Saskatoon.

2. Promote Saskatchewan foods and food production as a healthy community-minded choice.
3. Garden everywhere: expand capacity in urban agriculture.
4. Increase collaboration among producers and the development of needed supports.
5. Increase ways to obtain local food products.
6. Feed the children: substantially increase school meals and snacks.
7. Educate residents about healthy food and teach good food skills.
8. Increase availability and affordability of good food.
9. Increase people's ability to buy good food: reduce inequality.
10. Reduce food waste in the home and reduce energy input in food production.
11. Preserve water and land for the future.
12. Build knowledge of regional food systems.

Detail

2. Promote Saskatchewan foods and food production as a healthy, enjoyable, community-minded choice.

- It is opportune to make good food a key theme for Saskatoon, with the City of Saskatoon and Tourism Saskatoon becoming leaders in the regional food strategy, along with the food sector and organizations. We need to bring together partners from across the food system to explore challenges, and identify opportunity for growth. We need to build on the strengths that we have, by increasing collaborations among organizations active on food strategy goals.
- The overarching message is that Saskatchewan foods and food production are a healthy, enjoyable, community-minded choice.
- The City of Saskatoon should integrate the food strategy goals into the Official Community Plan and promote the food strategy as part of Saskatoon's image and values.
- Food tourism can be a strong contributor to the economy. Tourism Saskatoon should make the availability of interesting local food one of its attractions for Saskatoon. Tourism Saskatoon should market and promote the region's culinary offerings. It should work with local chefs to promote a city/region-oriented label for restaurants. Restaurants in tourist destinations, for example the Western Development Museum or Wanuskewin, could integrate local thematic food. Food festivals such as Taste of Saskatchewan or Folkfest could highlight local food components. The Star-Phoenix Taste of Saskatoon could include a local food component.
- The development of a media strategy for Saskatoon, including newspapers, food writers, social media and other forms, would be an important component of promoting local food and the food strategy in an ongoing way.



3. Garden everywhere: expand capacity in urban agriculture.

We need to grow more food in Saskatoon. We should strengthen the existing collaboration among CHEP, the City of Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan to increase support and leadership in urban agriculture, including the following key areas:

- Support existing community gardens and increase the number available. Having people garden on civic land decreases opportunities for crime and vandalism and builds community.
- Create a problem-solving mechanism to assist community gardens to function. Often there are specific logistical problems that good communication could easily resolve. This same mechanism could act to ensure that lower income communities not only have good access to gardens but are not impeded from using them through lack of specific resources, such as tools.
- Plan for community gardens in new neighbourhoods. This would be a better process than retroactively finding a suitable place for a community garden in existing neighbourhoods.
- Work with schools and other institutions interested in establishing gardens.
- Collaborate with interested First Nations and Métis organizations and communities to create and support programs and microenterprise for food production and processing.
- Develop a program to foster rooftop, balcony and boulevard gardens. Let people know that front-yard gardens are allowed.
- Develop CHEP's newly initiated shared-garden initiative, matching those with gardens to share, with others wanting to garden.
- Plant berry bushes and fruit trees where possible on city-owned land.
- Collaborate with Out of Your Tree to promote harvesting from fruit trees.
- Pilot promising practices in urban agriculture, promoting them and teaching about them.
- Create a training program in urban agriculture, which would include Seedy Saturday, and practice opportunities in CHEP and other projects, including recent initiatives in microenterprise projects.
- Inventory available land and resources
 - Develop an inventory of public and private land that can be leased by food growers. The inventory would include factors such as water access, slope and soil conditions.
 - Develop an interactive map that shows where all the edible fruit is on city park land, the U of S, and other accessible land, to encourage residents to harvest this fruit.
 - Develop an inventory of community accessible kitchens that the public can access.
- The City of Saskatoon should adopt several of the best practices in this area for its own jurisdiction, many already adopted by other cities, such as the following:
 - Allotment gardens
 - Add at least one allotment garden in the short term, and in the longer term, offer allotment gardens in the west, east, south and north parts of the city.
 - Consider reducing or eliminating the fee to make them more accessible.
 - Bylaws and practices supportive of urban agriculture
 - Actively inform residents about what practices are currently allowed in urban agriculture and what practices would be welcomed. For example, the City can support and educate its population about growing food in front yards, boulevards, vacant lots, right of ways, traffic circles etc. It could perhaps encourage the use of rain water/rain barrels connected to schools and businesses to serve as a water source for these gardens.



- In the longer term, review the City's OCP and zoning bylaws to remove impediments to or ambiguities about urban agriculture; and to create policies and allowable practices for commercial uses of urban agriculture.
- In the longer term, consider assigning civic staff to focus on supporting urban agriculture.

4. Increase ways to obtain local food products.

- There is a need for a "Saskatoon Food Hub" or centre, to act as a network hub, providing an important conduit for local food. CHEP could play this role, or perhaps a partnership could be formed. The Hub would:
 - Become the central registry for local food sources and urban-rural links, and hosting the on-line map of local food.
 - Increase bulk-buying, such as the Good Food Box, to increase the flow between producers and consumers at volume discounts.
 - Work with stores like Steep Hill, Herbs and Health, Dad's, and SaskMade to have a consistent and expanding repertoire of local products, perhaps over time increasing distribution to other small stores.
 - Work with the Saskatoon Farmers' Market to expand its producers, diversify its local produce and improve relationships with the core neighbourhoods.
 - Identify ways to support an increase in mini-Farmers Markets within the city, of various forms, while not jeopardizing the Saskatoon Farmers' Market.
 - Develop a stronger presence on the East Side of Saskatoon, to create a city-wide capacity and increase volumes.
- The Saskatoon Health Region should increase its purchase of local food by an increasing amount each year, to reach 5% of the total budget. In moving to centralize purchasing by all health regions, the province should include criteria to support local food purchasing.
- The U. of S. should participate in the national Farm to Cafeteria program, as a way to increase local food offerings in its cafeteria, and as a way to engage students and faculty in a local food system experience, while participating in a cross-Canada dialogue about it.

5. Increase collaboration among producers and the development of needed supports.

- There is a need for producers to collaborate in many different ways, to create economies of scale and increase their capacity and strength in the market, and invest in common infrastructure. Our assessment has documented some examples. There is also an opportunity for local retailers to provide leadership and flexibility in increasing their relationships with local producers.
- A project to "showcase" local producers as teaching examples would be beneficial to increasing both capacity and the potential for collaboration.
- There would be benefit in the partners in the Value Chain Initiative – the Saskatoon Co-ops and the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan -- to expand the number of producers over time, expanding the capacity of producers in providing organizational infrastructure; creating economies of scale by collaborating in production, and providing market stability through contracts.
- There may be potential for collaboration with interested First Nations communities in and near Saskatoon to build on the economic opportunity presented through their reserve land to produce food for local sale.



- The Saskatoon Food Hub, the Value Chain Initiative and the Food Centre should build knowledge about policies and programs that would support small and medium-sized farmers, including specific implementation guidelines for food safety in smaller enterprises, such knowledge to be used by provincial and federal agencies.

6. Feed the children: substantially increase school meals and snacks.

- City school boards, in partnership with CHEP and with financial support from the provincial government, should expand their meal programs within the community schools to provide meals to all children who attend those schools. This will improve the nutrition of all the children there, while removing the stigma of using the program. Education and engagement about good food should continue to be part of the programs. In addition, there is a need to develop understanding by the general public about the benefits of these programs.
- The provincial government should support childcare centres in providing healthy and affordable meals to children, perhaps through partnering with CHEP in Saskatoon. Over the longer term, the availability of healthy food should be expanded to all public places where children congregate, e.g., all schools, childcare centres, and leisure centres. There should be collaboration with national groups to develop a national child nutrition program for children in Canada.

7. Educate residents about healthy food and teach good food skills.

- Schools are an important site for education of children and families. Saskatoon School Boards, CHEP and the Saskatoon Health Region should continue to develop healthy eating programs in all schools, using standards such as health promoting schools, incorporating gardens, and integrating the families of children so that they learn and support their children's healthy choices.
- The Saskatoon Health Region should champion food security for residents as a determinant of health, and continue to partner with community organizations in increasing access to healthy food and providing education around it. It should be a leader in implementing the food strategy.
- First Nations and Métis organizations, CHEP and the Saskatoon Health Region should continue to collaborate in engaging these communities to participate in food education activities and to improve nutrition.
- CHEP and its partners, including the Saskatoon Health Region, should build on its collective kitchens and other programs that provide education and promotion about healthy food, by encouraging other organizations in the city to do the same with their clientele.
- Newcomer communities could be engaged in identifying how local ingredients can be used or adapted for creating their traditional recipes.
- Breast feeding is an important element of good nutrition. CHEP, the Saskatoon Health Region and others supporting the Saskatoon Breast-Friendly Initiative should continue their initiatives. They should also increase the public's understanding about why breast feeding is part of a good food strategy.

8. Increase availability and affordability of good food.

- CHEP and the new Saskatoon Food Hub should continue to develop ways to make good food available at reasonable prices, including bulk buying and the Good Food Box, as above, but also by providing senior-friendly, community and mobile markets. The Good Food Junction should ensure it continues to provide a healthy food choice for the core neighbourhoods.



- CHEP and the City of Saskatoon should continue to promote and develop community gardens in such a way as to keep them affordable and accessible to people with fewer resources, so that the gardens can be a way to supplement the food intake for lower income people.
- First Nations and Métis communities should continue to provide meals to those in need, while providing education and promotion about healthy food, integrating cultural traditions that enrich the lives of the community, and partnering with CHEP and other groups.
- The Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre should continue to enhance the nutritious elements of food hampers to those in need, while providing education and promotion about healthy food, and integrating projects such as the Potato Patch, which foster urban agriculture and participation by the larger community.

9. Increase people's ability to buy good food: reduce inequality.

- The Saskatoon Health Region should continue to focus on reducing health disparities in the city through health promotion in schools and action on including nutrition in schools and other social determinants of health, in partnership with community organizations.
- The Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership should support the recommendations of the food strategy as a means to reduce food insecurity for Saskatoon residents facing poverty, while continuing to advocate for policies that increase income and other supports.

10. Reduce food waste in the home and energy input in food production.

- Residents should seek food products with minimal packaging, reduce food waste in preparing food and compost food waste.
- The City of Saskatoon should implement the city-wide curbside composting program for food waste, now being studied.
- Federal and provincial government agricultural policies should include goals to reduce the carbon footprint of food production and processing. We need studies of on-farm energy use and energy use by other links in the food chain: transportation, processing and packaging. Farmers need support in moving toward livestock production strategies to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

11. Preserve water and land for the future.

Water

- Residents should conserve water and minimize the use of cosmetic pesticides in yards.
- The City of Saskatoon should increase protection of our water sources. We offer the following recommendations
 - Continue to support the protection plan for the South Saskatchewan River Watershed.
 - Incorporate green policies for its own buildings, for example, green roofs.
 - Adopt park design that reuses and saves treated water. (For example, instead of using treated water for spray pads only once before it is washed into the storm sewers, the water could flow to nearby trees, etc.).
- The provincial government should increase protection of our water sources from agricultural waste. Given limited water supplies, the government should prioritize irrigation projects that diversify food production and that target production to the local Saskatoon and area market.



Land

- Federal and provincial governments should implement agricultural policies to preserve and promote the next generations' ability to grow a diverse range of healthy food for our population. For example:
 - In cooperation with other provinces, Saskatchewan should enact a set of land ownership restrictions wherein farmland can only be owned by individuals who are provincial residents, or by incorporated farming operations owned by provincial residents. Residents of other provinces or nations and Saskatchewan non-farm corporations should not be allowed to own more than a small amount of Saskatchewan farmland.
 - Where the land is owned by Saskatchewan residents who are not active or retired farmers, e.g. by Saskatchewan residents who hold farmland as an investment, property tax rates should be higher.

12. Build knowledge of regional food systems.

In the assessment, we noted the need for a way to bring together and build on the different forms of knowledge toward the goal of improving the food system of our Saskatoon and area community. We suggest the following:

- The University of Saskatchewan should establish a regional food systems unit, comprised of university-based and community-based participants, to focus on studies of the local food economy. It would involve different departments and disciplines, including community health, plant sciences, and others but also community partners, such as CHEP and the SHR. The unit could encourage research at many different levels. Examples based on key informant interviews include studies that provide students with research opportunities such as regular food costing (as SHR is doing) nutrition tracking within the city, tracking vacant land uses in the city, and identifying conditions for rooftop gardens. Also arising from this assessment are proposals for studies of best-practices in small to medium-scale agriculture and food processing, and sector-specific analyses for increasing local markets for food products. Finally we need policy research on possibilities for different levels of government to increase support to the local food system. The unit should be housed in a department or college which has multi-disciplinary experience and community partnerships, such as within Plant Sciences in the College of Agriculture or Community Health and Epidemiology in the College of Medicine. Other options include the School of Environment and Sustainability or in the Division of Nutrition. Perhaps funding for a research chair in regional food systems could be obtained.
- In the short term, funds should be applied for to carry out further analyses of the food system in the Saskatoon area. Examples include:
 - Studies could be designed using data from Statistics Canada in conjunction with surveys of local producers to provide sector or product-specific analyses of potential.
 - Partners in First Nations and Métis organizations should be encouraged to collaborate in applying for funds to carry out a study of best practices for meeting the needs of First Nations and Métis communities through a food systems approach.
 - Saskatoon organizations such as the Saskatoon Environmental Society and the Waste Reduction Council could be encouraged to collaborate with others to create a research and education program about the environmental impacts and costs of food as it is consumed in Saskatoon, and how to reduce them.

ⁱ These recommendations are excerpted from the full report Towards a Food Strategy for Saskatoon: Saskatoon Regional Food System Assessment and Action Plan, prepared by Kouri Research for the Saskatoon Regional Food System and Action Plan Team, December, 2013. Online at saskatoonfood.ca.