

TOWARDS A FOOD STRATEGY FOR SASKATOON

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SASKATOON REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN¹

New Report Released

A group of Saskatoon organizations has just released its recipe for improving Saskatoon's food economy. "Saskatoon is named after a berry", they point out, "and is central to Canada's richest food producing area. We should be celebrating our bounty and no one should go hungry in our city."

The organizations include CHEP Good Food Inc., the City of Saskatoon, the Saskatoon Health Region, and the University of Saskatchewan. The group also includes individuals from the farm and food retail/wholesale sectors.²



In January 2014, the group released a report with plenty of ideas to enrich Saskatoon's food culture, increase food tourism and boost the local share of food produced and sold in the region, whether it be from farm products, city garden produce, harvested berries or other sources. The report also has proposals for reducing hunger in Saskatoon, especially among children. To move its strategy forward, the report recommends more collaboration among the organizations and individuals who produce and distribute food in the city and region, and creating a food council to implement the actions. The strategy also includes longer-term recommendations about food sustainability, reducing waste, and improving the knowledge base about food systems.

The report was the result of a year-long food assessment³ finding that Saskatoon is ready for the changes being proposed. Population and income trends point to growing interest in locally produced food and increased awareness about the importance of good food to health and community.

Many cities across Canada have conducted food assessments and adopted food strategies. Saskatoon has a Food Charter that was adopted in principle by City Council in 2002. The food strategy and food council now being proposed are a step forward from that.

¹Highlights are 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.

²The original members of the Saskatoon Regional Food System Assessment and Action Plan Team included: Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan; CHEP Good Food Inc.; City of Saskatoon Neighbourhood Planning; Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations; The Grocery People; Pineview Farms; Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence; Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre (Food Centre); Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture; Saskatoon Food Coalition; Saskatoon Health Region Population and Public Health; and University of Saskatchewan Department of Community Health and Epidemiology.

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A Food Strategy with Four Goals

The assessment was based on four goals for a regional food strategy:

Enrich Saskatoon's food culture. Enriching our food culture is a goal for the food strategy, and one that can serve as its overarching theme. Having a vibrant food culture makes sense socially and economically. It is positive and energizing. Although other, also important, goals related to the economy and health are more pragmatic, the attraction of working toward a vibrant food culture came out quite strongly in the focus groups. As one key informant said: *Food is culture is community.*

Ensure everyone has nutritious food. Nutritious food is the foundation of good health. All residents should eat well. Saskatoon's boom means more of us can afford nutritious food. But the boom also increases prices for housing and other goods, so people on lower incomes have less money to spend on food. Health disparities have increased in our city but our food strategy can help to reduce them.

Boost the hybrid food economy. Food exports are vital to Saskatchewan's economy and food imports provide us with a rich and varied diet. However, locally-produced food is critical to our long term self-sufficiency and our community. We support the concept of a hybrid economy, which includes import and export, but seeks a larger role for local.

Minimize food's ecological footprint. The environmental impacts of food production, processing, storage, transport and preparation are large, as are the financial costs of food waste. The food strategy seeks to minimize food's ecological footprint, from production to disposal of waste.



Levers for Change

Over the last decade, Saskatoon has experienced several trends driving an interest in more diverse food options, healthier, and from more local sources. The trends show that people want a diverse range of benefits from the food system. This diversity argues for change -- new and emerging drivers require a change in direction and focus for the food system.

In moving forward toward a food strategy, the report identified the following trends as levers for change:

- Residents are more educated about nutritious food and demanding more healthy food, and more local food.
- There is a recognized need to decrease diabetes and obesity rates and to reduce health disparities in Saskatoon.
- School meal programs are expanding and diversifying as a way to help more children learn.
- Many Saskatoon residents have more spending power.
- Local food producers and processors are actively pursuing local markets, improved infrastructure and support.
- Urban residents are actively pursuing food production in the city and organizations are supporting them.
- Health concerns are emerging from large-scale food processing.



- There is growing concern about impacts on the environment and that climate change will mean food shortages everywhere, making food self-sufficiency imperative.
- Local and provincial organizations are working to improve the Saskatoon food system.

Moving Forward: Saskatoon Community Food Council

Many individuals, organizations, and enterprises are already supporting change in the Saskatoon food system. A food strategy should build on existing strengths to create a critical mass.

1. The 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. Based on the responses in the assessment, an explicit commitment to healthy food produced regionally and in a sustainable environment, accessible to community members in diverse ways, would be a message consistent with residents' values.

The Food Council 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.



The report noted and described emerging collaborations within and among local producers, processors and consumers. It made recommendations for how these collaborations can become stronger. It also recommended new collaborations, in particular a Saskatoon Healthy Food Hub, which would be a social enterprise site for demonstration/promotion of collaboration among local producers, consumers, food organizations, researchers and others, a local food broker and bulk buyer and a clearinghouse to share information about the provision of healthy accessible food in Saskatoon. The report also recommended increased collaboration with and within the University of Saskatchewan and related research resources.



Action Plan Recommendations

The Saskatoon Community Food Council would act on the recommendations the report has 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.**

Next Steps

The Team is committed itself to initiate a Saskatoon Community Food Council and will continue to promote the food strategy, inviting participation from other individuals and organizations to foster the vision and strategy.

Our Vision

Our city is nourished by healthy and tasty food produced regionally. Good food is part of our traditions as prairie people, both as First Nations and newcomers. Making the most of our northern climate and fertile lands, we have a hybrid food economy that takes advantage of our local bounty as well as importing and exporting healthy food.

Our city creates opportunities for residents to grow and harvest food to eat. Our markets, stores and restaurants sell food from our region. We provide good jobs and fair returns to farmers, linked to our agricultural prosperity, encouraging local opportunities for food harvesting, processing, and distribution.

All residents have access to safe, nutritious food, and partake in the local bounty. All of our children are nourished properly so they can grow physically and mentally.

We are good stewards of the land and water, minimizing waste and preserving the ecosystem. We celebrate our bounty and appreciate its benefits to our community.