The Current State of Local Food Use and Food Literacy in Meal and Snack Programs Targeted to Young Children in Ontario

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

There is a gap in knowledge around local food awareness and use, food literacy attitudes in programs serving food to young children.

Project Goal: To identify what is needed to support more local food use and local food literacy in meal and snack programs targeting young children.

Project Summary: The purpose of this research project was to investigate local food utilization and determine the knowledge, attitude and awareness of local food and food literacy, among key influencers of young children in Ontario. We also aimed to learn about the challenges, barriers and opportunities regarding local food use and food literacy in Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs) and child care, including before and after-school programs in elementary school or community settings, that were providing meals or snacks to young children (ages 4-7). We also wanted to determine what food literacy tools and resources were being used to educate food providers and educators in early childhood settings as well as the resources used and supports needed to educate young children and their parents and caregivers about local foods and healthy eating. Dissemination plans include sharing these results broadly with program funders, partners and advisors for future planning around local food and local food literacy promotion and activities.

Research Methodology: The research conducted in the Fall of 2018 was multifaceted and included several components:

1. Key informant interviews with selected providers of meal or snack programs for young children including food suppliers and distributors, student meal program caterers, child care program administrators and SNP area coordinators, to learn about the ordering/availability of local foods, the challenges/barriers and enablers of procuring and offering local food, and local food procurement standards or policies.
2. Online survey with program administrators and staff (food preparers, educators, supervisors) and volunteers working in SNPs and child care, including before and after school programs located in the early childhood elementary school or community setting, to assess the attitudes, awareness, understanding and use of local foods and local food literacy.
3. Scan of resources currently used and/or available to educate cooks/caterers and program staff of early childhood meal and snack program on local foods, local food literacy and healthy eating as well as resources used to increase knowledge of local foods and food literacy for children, their parents and caregivers.
PARTNERS & ADVISORS

The Nutrition Resource Centre at the Ontario Public Health Association collaborated with the Greenbelt Fund on this research project in partnership with the Food Innovation & Research Studio (FIRSt) at George Brown College (GBC) and the Helderleigh Foundation. Project advisors were from Ontario Dietitians in Public Health, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Sustain Ontario.

We would like to thank the following project partners and advisors:

- Ontario Public Health Association (Nutrition Resource Centre) – Lynn Roblin (research coordinator), Karen Gough, Candace Aqui, Sylvia Black and Kristie Pun (Dietetic Intern)
- Greenbelt Fund – Sagal Dualeh
- George Brown College - Food Innovation & Research Studio (FIRSt) – Tricia Ryan & Winnie Chiu
- George Brown College – Early Childhood Education Program (ECE) - Barb Pimento & Pat Chorney Rubin
- Ontario Dietitians in Public Health - Elizabeth Smith
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture - Tyler Brooks
- Sustain Ontario – Carolyn Webb

The Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) at the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) provided overall project management, development of data collection tools, collection and dissemination of the results, and communication with funders, partners and advisors.

The Greenbelt Fund is a not-for-profit organization that works with businesses, institutions and NGOs to make Ontario’s farmers the first choice for consumers. The Greenbelt Fund provided financial support and also acted as advisors on this project.

The Food Innovation & Research Studio (FIRSt) at George Brown College (GBC) is an applied research facility funded by the federal government as a Technology Access Centre (TAC). FIRSt supported overall planning and conducted and analyzed key informant interviews with food suppliers, brokers and caterers. GBC ECE program provided overall guidance for planning and providing child care contacts.

The Helderleigh Foundation (HF) is a private philanthropic foundation that collaborates with others to enhance food literacy and applied nutrition within Canada. The HF provided financial support for this project.

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) is the independent and official voice of over 200 Registered Dietitians working in public health in Ontario. ODPH participated as an advisor to share expertise and connect with their members through their various workgroups (e.g. childcare, food literacy, school nutrition).

Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is a farmer-led organization that supports sustainable food and farming in Ontario. The OFA was involved in an advisory capacity to network with their industry and commodity group partners.

Sustain Ontario – Ontario Edible Education Network (OEEN) brings together people and organizations to share resources, ideas, and experiences to encourage food literacy in children and youth. They served as an advisor and connected with their extensive stakeholder network.
BACKGROUND

Why do this research? The Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) at the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) participated in a project led by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA 2017) to assess the knowledge, attitude & awareness of local food and food literacy in parents with children at home, teens and millennials. That project provided insight into food literacy and awareness of local foods, food production, and purchasing habits of parents with children, however, there remained a lack of information available about the use of local and sustainable foods and food literacy attitudes and awareness of people who work with and who provide food to young children outside the home. While there is high consumer interest in consuming local foods to support their local economy (Mintel Research, 2017) little is known about interest in and use of local food from suppliers of food for young children.

With over 5400 licensed child care centres and over 3500 Student Nutrition Program (SNP) sites in Ontario, there is potentially significant opportunity to influence the selection, consumption and awareness of healthy, local foods through menu offerings, local food literacy and nutrition education in these settings. Research shows that food skills programs offering experiential learning to children and youth aged 4-18 years contributes significantly to increasing vegetable and fruit consumption. In addition, early childhood food experiences lead to later food choices and are an important factor for future health. Educating young children (ages 4 – 7) about local food and healthy eating will give them a lifelong head start in adopting healthy and sustainable eating habits.

Source: Mintel Research, 2017

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2 Child Care in Ontario. Available from: Ontario’s Early Years and Child Care Annual Report 2018

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
WHAT WE LEARNED & OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS

The following is a summary of what we learned from key informant surveys with five major food suppliers/distributors and seven caterers servicing meal and snack programs for young children in Ontario. We also interviewed five child care program managers and seven Student Nutrition Program (SNPs) food logistics coordinators/program managers. For the online survey, 213 child care and SNP program managers or staff responded. Responses included 128 Ontario SNPs or other meal and snack programs offered in school or community setting (60% of total respondents) and 85 child care responses from licensed child care programs, recreational camps or other child care settings (40% of respondents).

Local Foods

- There is a network of food suppliers, distributors and caterers throughout Ontario that is interested and able to provide local foods for meal and snack programs for young children in childcare, school or community settings.
- Caterers across Ontario use large distributors like Gordon Food Service, Sysco and Flanagan’s to source food. Some caterers who provide meal programs in the GTA access food from the Ontario Food Terminal. There seems to be a strong focus on buying local and using individual suppliers. Respondents talked about having access to over 100 suppliers of local ingredients and products. Some caterers have farmers that grow for them and others pay a premium to purchase local foods, which to them are more desired.
- In Ontario, seasonality impacts food purchases and menu development of the caterers. However, small caterers can be more nimble and change ingredients, while large suppliers can’t. Accessing local food for caterers is not the biggest challenge. Pricing may be a limiting factor for some as their budgets may limit any use of any expensive ingredients, but it appears the desire for fresh often outweighs the price. There was no use of buying groups mentioned by any catering respondents.
- The online survey indicated that child care (47%) and student nutrition programs (56%) utilize grocery stores over food suppliers and distributors or caterers as their number one source of food for their programs. The majority of programs supplying meals for young children, either childcare (78%) or SNPs (52%), report they do not participate in group purchasing, which presents an opportunity for further exploration. However, three of the interviewees did mention group buying through Ontario Student Nutrition Services and one mentioned they used MealSource.
- Child care and SNPs are supportive of using local foods and would like to use them more. Local foods used most often are fruit and vegetables; milk, cheese, yogurt; eggs; grain products and meat.
- Most child care and SNPs expressed desire to work more closely with local food suppliers but identified a number of challenges including: lack of consistent local food availability; perception that local food costs more; lack of local suppliers; local food supplier/farmers don’t deliver small orders; and lack of staff or volunteers to prepare local food. Most successes revolve around local availability via markets/stores/distributors/farmers/etc.
- Some solutions suggested to increase the use of local foods in child care and student nutrition programs were: financial support; provision of local foods through existing supplier/easier availability (e.g. through one source); more information on where to access; and delivery to site.
Other suggestions included a central ordering site and development of a provincial online tracking system, such as the food sharing program and webtracker portal used by several Eastern Ontario SNPs.

- There appears to be a lack of educational resources and training for caterers and the buyers and cooks from child care and SNPs related to local food procurement and implementation of food safety/safe food handling regulations. Food program buyers and cooks need to understand where the ingredients are coming from when contacting “local” suppliers. Food distributors, caterers, and end users providing meals to children could potentially work together on resources to increase knowledge of and ways to incorporate local foods. A factsheet about local foods and how to source them would be helpful. Online training programs and resources could be offered online.

- Promotion of local food could be ramped up, with targeted communications to cooks and buyers of programs that provide food to young children. Increasing connections between child care organizations and local food producers to strengthen relationships and partnerships was also mentioned. Could start by working more closely with child care programs or SNPs who already have a strong partnership with a farmer or with those using foods from a community garden, to set up some guidelines that can be used by others.

- Distribution including transportation and delivery is a big issue across child care and SNPs. Opportunities exist for a more synced system for local food procurement that could connect child care and nutrition programs with other institutional food services in communities (e.g. hospitals, long term care, retirement homes, colleges, universities, etc.) or food hubs to create group buying and shared transportation/distribution and delivery chains. For example, MealSource, in partnership with Student Nutrition Ontario explored the feasibility of group-purchasing frameworks for SNPs and piloted tested a group purchasing partnership with the Southwest region in 2015.

### Local Food Literacy

- While food suppliers and distributors were not able to define food literacy, caterers and meal preparers understood it to be a combination of understanding nutrition knowledge, food skills, and the food system. Child care and SNP staff were more familiar with the concept of food literacy and most could describe it as “knowing where food comes from” or “identifying what is a healthy food”.

- Local food literacy was considered important by all respondents. Food suppliers and distributors create a number of knowledge products to inform their staff and clients about local foods (e.g. websites, magazines, blogs, reports, etc), and this is also a component of their marketing of local food products. None of the materials produced by food suppliers and distributors were specific to the education of young children or parents about local food or healthy eating.

- Many of the caterers provide in-house training to their staff about the mission and goals of their catering organization. Some do create materials and offer activities to support local food literacy. The caterers interviewed were very interested in promoting local foods for the betterment of children’s health.

- Child care programs are more likely to offer programming related to food literacy compared to SNPs. However, child care programs also reported a lack of educational resources and training of staff to do this and that food literacy was not the most important priority.

- SNPs reported that food literacy was important to connect students to the community and food system and to help children eat healthier, however because this is outside of their mandate they
Many organizations are involved in producing food literacy support materials, including the Nutrition Resource Centre at OPHA, ODPH, Sustain Ontario, the OFA’s Six by Sixteen Program and Foodland Ontario. These organizations could work together with child care and SNPs to develop materials to promote local food literacy.

The creation of tools and resources informed by the findings of this environmental scan and targeted to early childhood setting meal providers would enhance the knowledge and utilization of local foods and increase understanding, profitability and resiliency of the local agricultural system. The desired outcome would be for meal and snack programs offered through SNPs or child care and before or after school settings to incorporate and promote more local foods through local food procurement, menu planning, recipes, and food literacy activities, which will result in the selection, use and consumption of more local and healthy foods by young children and their parents and caregivers.
“It is important for us to support local farmers and we strive to promote the health and well-being of children and youth in our community.”
*Caterer of meals for children in childcare and schools*

“We care very much where the food is sourced from, we purposely budget higher food cost to accommodate local food.”
*Caterer of meals for children in schools and camps*

“We do cooking with the children and have found that when the children get to cook/prepare the food they are more likely to try new and healthier food as they had the opportunity to make it and we talk about how to make it better and more to their taste.”
*Child care provider*

Photo credits:
L: Healthy Kids Community Challenge – Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care
RESEARCH PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the current state of food literacy among providers of food for young children in Ontario, in order to encourage more local food use in menu offerings and local food literacy activities targeted to the aforementioned groups.

Research Objective/Expected Outcomes

Define the food system impacting 4-7 year old children in Ontario and obtain an understanding of:

- knowledge, attitudes and awareness of local and healthy food and food literacy of food providers and educators, and the current resources and nutrition education being used among food providers and educators of children ages 4-7 throughout Ontario
- the use of and preference for local and healthy food throughout the buying, serving and educational activities, including challenges, barriers and facilitators
- how food literacy and nutrition education can be used to promote the use of local and healthy foods and reach the food providers and educators of children 4-7 years of age
- effective tools and resources to support food providers, educators, parents, caregivers and children to increase the use and intake of local and healthy food

Target Audiences

Within the program several target audiences have been defined as part of the food system impacting young children.

- Food suppliers/distributors (e.g. Gordon Food Service, Sysco; more than 33 companies - some with multiple locations in Ontario)
- Food Service Companies (e.g. Real Food for Real Kids, Lunch Lady; about 30 companies – some with multiple locations in Ontario)
- Child care program directors/managers/staff (ECE, cooks) in before or after school programs in school or community
- Student Nutrition Program (SNP) agencies/coordinators/volunteers (14 lead agencies in Ontario)
- Partners of OFA – 6 X16, registered dietitians in public health/members of ODPH, members of Sustain Ontario’s Edible Education Network (for environmental scan of resources)

Methodology

The program was multifaceted and involved several components.

1. Qualitative research - key informant interviews with selected providers of meal or snack programs for young children including SNP area coordinators, student meal program cooks/caterers, food suppliers and distributors to learn about the ordering/availability of local foods, challenges/barriers and enablers of procuring and offering local food; and local food
procurement standards or policies: attitudes and awareness of local food literacy and food literacy activities.

- The qualitative research involved contacting and conducting telephone interviews with key informants/experts who provide food service to or who work in child care or student nutrition programs in Ontario including:
  - Food suppliers and distributors serving Ontario child care and student nutrition programs in schools and in the community. There are over 33 companies, some with multiple locations, regionally distributed across Ontario. Contacted through GBC.
  - Caterers and food service companies supplying food to child care, school and community food and nutrition programs. There are about 30 companies, some with multiple locations, regionally distributed across Ontario. Contacted through GBC.
  - Program administrators in small and large licensed child care agencies – regionally distributed across Ontario. Interviewees recommended by GBC advisory group members working in child care. Contacted through NRC.
  - SNP area coordinators regionally distributed across Ontario. There are 14 lead agencies in Ontario. Contacted through NRC.

- Two separate key informant interview guides were used covering similar questions, one for food suppliers/distributors and catering organizations in Ontario; and another for child care and SNP program managers.

2. **Quantitative research** - an online survey with program staff (food preparers, educators, supervisors) and volunteers working in SNPs, child care and after school programs located in the early childhood elementary school or community setting to assess the attitudes, awareness, understanding and use of local foods and food literacy.

- The quantitative research involved emailing a survey link to child care and SNP program managers in Ontario.
  - The survey was posted online and remained open from Nov 27 to Dec 14, 2018.
  - The link to the survey was shared by email through people who were contacted for Key Informant Interviews, including SNP coordinators and child care administrators across Ontario, as well as through several child care organizations and networks, and through the project advisory committee networks including George Brown College ECE program, Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH), Sustain Ontario, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).
  - The survey link was also shared through Twitter by the NRC, ODPH, Sustain Ontario, OFA and others.
  - The survey was intended to be completed by administrators or staff (e.g. chef/cook/meal preparer/educators) of child care programs (including before and after school) and coordinators, staff, or volunteers of student nutrition programs at the local level.
  - The target was programs serving children 4-7 years of age, however, the survey allowed those serving children outside of this age range to complete the survey.
  - If the person who tried to complete the survey indicated they were not serving children the survey was then terminated.
The survey asked a number of questions to understand the situation in their program with respect to local food and food literacy.

- The online survey was not anticipated to be a representative sample of child care or student nutrition programs across Ontario, however, the results would be indicative of the situation with respect to local food use and food literacy in meal and snack programs offered to young children. There are 5347 licensed child cares in Ontario (4128 (76%) not for profit; 1309 (24%) for profit) and 122 agencies. The are 4600 student nutrition programs in Ontario, operating through 3500 sites (some offer more than one program, e.g. breakfast + snack + lunch).

3. **Scan of resources** currently used and available to educate cooks/caterers and program staff of early childhood meal and snack program on local foods and food literacy and healthy eating as well as resources used to increase knowledge of local foods and food literacy for children, their parents and caregivers. We accessed this information by doing a search of available resources, and by contacting our partners and advisors and/or sending an email request or short survey to their constituents.

- The scan of resources involved requesting and searching for resources between September 3, 2018, and September 28, 2018. For resources to be included in the environmental scan, the resources had to be relevant to the following target audiences: parents and caregivers of children aged 4-7, children (4-7 years), ECEs, food providers (including cooks and caterers who prepare meals and snacks), food distributors, and student nutrition program staff or volunteers. Resources were gathered through two main methods:
  - Internal scan and collection of resources and resources shared by Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) staff.
  - External scan of resources – emails/surveys: Two surveys were utilized in this environmental scan to help determine what types of resources are used by 1) early childhood education (ECE) program administrators/faculty and 2) resources used or developed by dietitians, marketing boards and other food literacy stakeholders.

**Timeline**

- August 2018 – planning & preliminary research
- September to October 2018 – environmental scan of resources; planning for qualitative (key informant interviews (KII)) and quantitative research (online survey)
- October 2018 – development of two key informant interview guides for: 1) Food suppliers and catering organizations in Ontario, 2) Student Nutrition Program and Child Care Centre Managers; conduct interviews
- November 2018 – quantitative research - finalize and launch online survey
- December 2018 – analysis & debriefs of qualitative and quantitative research
- January to March 2019 – finalize and disseminate findings and recommendations

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KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Food Supplier/Food Distributor Network - Key Informant Findings

This report provides an overview of the key informant interview responses from food suppliers and food service distributors that service licensed childcare centres and meal and snack programs in school or community settings serving young children in Ontario.

George Brown College FIRST conducted the key informant interviews with:

- Food service suppliers or distributors across the province that service profit and not-for-profit organizations with children in childcare or in student nutrition programs or community programs serving meals or snacks to school age children.
- A specific focus was the 4-7 year old target audience, however those serving children ages 8 years and older were also interviewed.
- Food service suppliers or distributors servicing the caterers of childcare or student meal or snack programs across the province.

The proposed food service suppliers and distributors were contacted by telephone and interviewed for half an hour each during the month of November 2018.

This report is a summary of the key learnings from interviews with food service suppliers and food distributors serving childcare and student nutrition programs or organizations.

Background & Description of Interviewees

Thirty six food service suppliers and distributors were identified and contacted to participate in key informant interviews. Additionally, all websites were reviewed for all distributors to confirm relevance. Some, including confectionery or coffee distributors or those who only distributed imported foods were deemed not relevant for this study. The list demonstrates how broad the food distributor network is, yet when reviewed for relevance to our target it segments to a small group of large distributors, which is positive as they are easy to identify and reach. Of the 36 identified food service suppliers and distributors, seven of them service childcare centres, schools, camps and the caterers that support these early childhood settings:

- Of the seven two did not sell any fresh/local products only canned, frozen goods and these were imported products.
- Three were medium size players with a produce only focus in the GTA and Ottawa area (Lanzarotta & Leonard Wholesale and Quattrocchi).
- The 3 remaining were all big players – Sysco, Flanagans, and Gordon Food Service. They covered all of Ontario and had comprehensive buy local programs.
- The Ontario Food Terminal is part of this food service system representing over 400 local farmers and is a source of local products for caterers of childcare, school and community snack and meal programs.

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
Observations & information shared by interviewees:

Are the facilities you supply food to primarily...
- A combination of both for and not for profit.

Describe the community that you serve/provide food for?
- Most of the relevant suppliers cover all of Ontario/Canada.
- Three were medium sized supporting specifically the GTA and Ottawa area.

Please describe your service:

The key players were food service distributors/brokers with multiple locations throughout Ontario, covered all product categories and supported their clients with marketing and promotion support in addition to selling them a comprehensive line of food products.

What food suppliers/ producers/ farmers do you use?
- Multiple suppliers - as many as 1000 for some of the distributors in the network reviewed.
- Flanagans has over 500 Ontario dairy, meat and fruit and vegetable suppliers. They also have a “Flanagan Market” business that supplies local niche products – there are over 1000 items listed and sold in the Flanagan market program.
- Leonard Wholesale also has a buy local program.
- Sysco and Gordon Food Service have similar local food programs but are less explicit about them (i.e. don’t have a special name or place on their website).
Where do you source your food – buy local versus other manufacturers/suppliers?

- Local is one of the areas of focus for the larger distributors.
- Many of the distributors provide specialty umbrella brands that support the buy local emphasis. For example, Flanagan’s Market hosts a website that features niche, local items available for purchase directly from growers and farmers in your area. Browse more than 1,000 items and coordinate delivery, payment and pick-up with suppliers. The platform is free to sign up and there are no charges (ever) for use. There is also a 2-minute video demo on how to place an order with the Flanagan’s Market here.

Does this change with seasonality?

- Yes for sure especially with produce.
- The use of greenhouses and hydroponics does provide year round seasonality for some products. This allows for the buy local movement to exist 12 months a year for produce items.
- Frequently the following are hydroponically grown...
  - Tomatoes
  - Lettuce
  - Cucumber
  - Spring onions
  - Peppers
  - Spinach
  - Strawberries
  - Blueberries.

Nutrition policy, philosophy or procurement guidelines

Canada’s Food Guide was mentioned. No challenges as this is really up to the client.

Why buy local food?

Distributors support the use of local ingredients for a number of reasons identified below....

- Local food is fresh and healthier – “Truly! Shorter travel distances mean more nutritious food”.
- It is community oriented; local farmers have families in our communities.
- It supports environmental sustainability: local farms help to preserve land, water, and natural resources.
- There’s a wide selection: heritage varieties, non-GMO, natural, organic choices.
- Buying local suggests less processing, less preservatives etc.
- Another important aspect of buying local is that consumers are now demanding and supporting the cause...especially millennials
- It supports our local economy.

Some of the distributors mentioned that buying local is in their roots. They were once a small local supplier and they want to support others (i.e. Flanagans & Leonard Wholesale). According to Sysco and Flanagan’s roughly 30-40% of all food sold is local for these distributors.

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
How do you define local food for your organization?

Food service distributors define local food according to definitions established and shared by Foodland Ontario. These definitions are embraced by the food service distributors in Ontario and are actually listed on some of their websites. For example, in Ontario Flanagan's local food program, features more than 500 Ontario dairy, protein and produce products from a wide selection of producers. They strictly follow the consumer and industry approved definitions of Ontario food products outlined by Foodland Ontario. You can find definitions for each commodity on the Foodland Ontario website.

What local food/ingredients do you carry most often?

- For the distributors specific to produce it is fruits and vegetables.
- For the larger distributors – Flanagan’s, Sysco, and Gordon Food Serve they serve food from all of the food categories as listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Food</th>
<th>Served or not Served (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables &amp; Fruit</td>
<td>Yes all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Vegetables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salad Mix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Fruit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned/Jarred Fruit and Fruit Sauces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit Juice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grain Products</strong></td>
<td>Yes all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread - fresh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread - frozen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancake mix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal - Cold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal – Hot/Oats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain Bars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers/Rice Cakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baked goods – cookies, biscuits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta/Rice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Milk &amp; Alternatives</strong></td>
<td>Yes all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fortified soy beverage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meat &amp; Alternatives</strong></td>
<td>Yes all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legumes/nuts/seeds/butters/hummus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>Yes all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spreads – butter, margarine, cream cheese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable dips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oils &amp; salad dressing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey, jam, fruit butter, syrup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do you track local food used?

- All interviewees confirmed that local food sales are tracked by dollars sold.
- When interviewed the distributors suggested that 30-40% of their sales are local ingredients from a range of product categories (i.e. produce, meats, dairy, cheese, eggs, grains, food made by local producers – honey, maple syrup, snack foods etc.)

Challenges, Barriers, Opportunities, Successes with Local Food?

There are no barriers to accessing local foods to use in food programs. Price can vary by season for some goods and by manufacturer size and pricing strategy. The end user makes the choice based upon their needs and budgets.

Attitudes about Local Food?

The distributors are all supportive of local foods. Some so focused they use it as a marketing tool. Flanagan’s is a good example. They see themselves as once a local supplier that has grown and want to support other local suppliers.

Sysco, Tree of Life, Flanagan all quoted the benefits of local with respect to helping local economies. But they also see these products as healthier and fresher. They have also built their businesses on specialty import foods as they serve a large ethnic market in Canada. There seems to be a balance between the benefits of local, price, and wanting to offer unique products to have a competitive edge.

What information, tools or resources do you require to enable your staff or program buyers to incorporate/provide more local food?

- Ideally a package that addresses the distributors’ needs (sell products and services) but complements current buy local programs that are tailored to our target audience.
- Could work with an end user caterer (e.g. Real Food for Real Kids) and child care programs to create a reference/benchmark program for local foods that could be rolled out in Ontario to programs that feed children. These resources could be shared by key food service distributors the caterers buy from.

How would you define/describe food literacy?

- Viewed as an ambiguous term – did not create an instant response or definition.

What tools and resources are used for educating staff and clients about local food or healthy eating?

- The distributors do create knowledge products to inform and train their end user clients (e.g. websites, magazines, blogs, reports). This is also part of their marketing initiatives. These marketing resources can be capitalized upon for further training on buy local and healthy food programs for children in our target audience.
- Many distributors have chefs and dietitians working in their educational and sales programs to provide unique and comprehensive education (e.g. Gordon Food Service has dietitians on staff to support healthy eating programs and menu development).
Knowledge of specific educational programs to foster healthy eating in schools by distributors is not well known.

Resources Provided

- Currently distributors are providing
  - Product education
  - Buy local programs
  - Buy local incentive programs
  - Menu planning support
  - Access to dietitians
  - Training programs
  - Magazines with great content
  - Blog posts
  - Trend reports
  - Organized “buy local” programs
  - Trade shows at their specific properties.

- None of these materials are specific to the education of young children about local food or eating healthy.

Do you provide any activities related to local food literacy in your foodservice programming that is communicated to the staff, parents or caregivers of the children in the meal or snack program you service?

- None of the interviewees were aware of these types of activities.

Summary of Observations & Recommendations

- Key distributors with a national presence embrace and promote buy local programs.
- There are multiple suppliers of local foods with over 100 suppliers and as many as 1000 products listed by some of the distributors in the network (e.g. Flanagan’s market program).
- Roughly 30-40% of sales within these large scale national distributors are local Ontario products.
- Distributors support and promote the use of local food for many reasons including fresher, less processed and healthier food, supporting the local economy and local farm families, and environmental sustainability.
- Food literacy was not readily defined by food suppliers and distributors.
- While distributors create a number of knowledge products to inform and train their end user clients (e.g. website, magazines, blogs, reports) these were viewed as more marketing materials. None of the materials were specific to the education of young children about local food or healthy eating.
- There are really only seven key players in the market and most of them are large distributors. Reaching out and providing support seems very achievable. Having them identified and included in the food system would not be challenging. They already have programs in place for educating and supporting end user buyers.
- Creating a package that addresses the distributors’ needs as well as their target audience (e.g. caterers and child care, SNPs) to complement their current buy local programs would be welcome and easy for distributors to disseminate with the materials and systems they currently have in place. The program could be developed using a distributor (e.g. Flanagan) as a test...
market and expanded to other distributors based upon the distributor’s experience and success metrics.

- Work at the Ontario Food Terminal to provide information about local foods would also be a great way to reach smaller caterers that work within the food distribution system.
- The Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA) would also be a great resource for ideas on how to reach the membership and develop programs to increase use of local produce.
Catering and Food Service Outlets - Key Informant Findings

This report provides an overview of the key informant interview responses from catering businesses that service licensed childcare centres and meal and snack programs in school or community settings serving young children in Ontario.

George Brown College FIRSt conducted the interviews with:

- Catering businesses and food service outlets from across the province that service profit and not-for-profit child care providers and/or school or community meal and snack programs for young children.
- A specific focus is the 4-7 year old target audience, however those serving children 8 years and older were also interviewed.
- Food service suppliers and distributors that supply foods to the caterers identified above were interviewed in the previous section.

The proposed caterers and food service outlets were contacted by telephone and interviewed for half an hour during the month of November 2018.

This report is a summary of the key learning from interviews with the caterers and food service outlets serving childcare and student nutrition and snack programs.

Background & Description of Interviewees

Twenty six caterers were identified, contacted and invited to participate in a key informant interview, however, only 7 responded (27%) and participated.

- The catering companies who participated ranged in size from small (less than 5 employees) to large (more than 50 employees) and included urban, rural and remote clients.
- The 7 respondents included representatives from southern, central and eastern Ontario.
- The caterers provided services to both for and not-for profit organizations.
- All catering companies reported knowledge of and compliance with legislation and nutritional guidelines for commercial food preparation for childcare and school food service for children in Ontario.
- All 7 of the catering companies who participated in the key informant interviews all report that their services were grounded in the belief that they were caring and compassionate in their approach to “feeding children”. Quote from one of the caterers: “We care about where the food comes from, how it is grown and how it is made. It is important for us to support local farmers and we strive to promote the health and well-being of children and youth in our community”.

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
Observations & information shared by interviewees:

What types of program(s) do you supply/provide food for?

- All participants of the survey were preparing meals or snacks for schools, child care facilities, camps, or child care centres.

Are the facilities you supply food to primarily...

- Half of the respondents were exclusively for profit and half were a not for profit provider of services.
- There is a tendency for caterers to be a not for profit provider as larger programs like the City of Toronto are driven by lowest cost, so profit providers like RFRK cannot compete and service these types of contracts.

Where are the programs you supply/provide food for located?

A cross section of Ontario was covered by the participating respondents...
- Central East Ontario including Toronto – GTA
- Eastern Ontario - Bancroft, Minden, Prince Edward County, Stoney Lake
- South West, Central West, Central East include Toronto, Eastern Ontario
  - London Ontario area
- Essex County

Describe the community that you serve/provide food for? ...

A cross section of communities were covered by the respondents...
- Urban/suburban GTA
- Urban/suburban/rural remote

Please describe your service:

Respondents reflected single and multiple locations...
- Food service supplier/caterer (multiple locations)
- YMCA largest client - serve 25.0K children per day
- Real Food for Real Kids - serve 20.0K children per day
- Food service supplier/caterer - 2 professional kitchens, 1 restaurant and 1 back prep
- Food service supplier one location
- Food service supplier multiple locations
When you order, provide or serve food that will be consumed by young children in a meal or snack program what age range are the children being served?

Respondents covered a range of ages, there is roughly a 50/50% split for younger children (under 8). Here are the age ranges served by the respondents:

- Children ages 4 to 7
- Children ages 8+
- Children and youth ages 4 to 13
- Children and youth ages 4 to 17

What % of your sales would be to the 4-7 age group?
This varied by supplier, for e.g. these splits were mentioned:

- 55% ages 4-7 and 45% 8+
- 40% ages 4-7 and 60% 8+

Are the foods for children prepared at your facility and then shipped to the school/child care facility?

All respondents prepared food at their facility and delivered it to the child care program or school facility. In other words, none of the food was being prepared at the child care facility.

What food supplier(s) do you use? Do you do any group buying? How is this done?

Respondents seemed to use a diverse group of suppliers for ingredients in the food they were preparing for children. Local individual suppliers came up for many of the caterers. Caterers did make use of large distributors like GFS, Sysco. Caterers in the GTA did also use the Ontario Food Terminal. There was no use of buying groups by any respondents.

- “Multiple suppliers”
- “Local farms, local stores, Costco”
- “Ontario Food Terminal”
- “Gordon Food Service – GFS”
- “Western Bakeries”
- “European Meat – Ontario Food Terminal”
- “Use more than 100 local only vendors”
- “Local farmers”
- “Sysco”
- “Local farmers, distributors restaurants use, Sysco & Gordons Food Service”

Where do you source your food – buy local versus other manufacturers/suppliers?

There seems to be a strong focus on buying local and using individual suppliers. Local food is a priority. Respondents talked about having over 100 suppliers of ingredients.
Does this change with seasonality?

In Ontario, seasonality does impact food purchases and menu development.

- “Yes for sure”
- “Yes, changes over winter”
- “Menu changes 2 times per year, seasonally driven”
- “Our menu changes with every season to ensure we’re maximizing variety on the plate! Who doesn’t love digging into crisp asparagus in May and June or creamy sweet potatoes in November and December! Each month we offer a variety of globally inspired dishes to expand the palates of our learning eaters!”
- “Some felt you could get better prices in the winter on some local ingredients”

Are you making this request or is it offered up by your supplier?

Suppliers seem to give suggestions and pricing ideas for caterers. Menus are altered seasonally, but also for special events like Halloween, Christmas etc. Caterers drive menu content. Small caterers can be more nimble and change ingredients, while large suppliers can’t.

- “Both, but we drive the requests”
- “Green Hearts has such buying power, farmers grow for them”
- “Growing Chefs prepared to pay a premium for locally grown food”

Do you care where food is sourced from or do you just buy on price?

Respondents all voiced strongly a desire to buy local first and foremost. Price does matter for the not-for-profit. Caterers like Real Food for Real Kids and Growing Chefs will buy based upon an ingredient desired more so than price.

- “Depends upon the ingredient – banana, mango, olive oil, melons can’t get locally”
- “Depends upon the theme of our meals e.g. Halloween then we buy the ingredient we need”
- “Even strawberries which are local for a great part of the year they don’t have shelf life we need”
- “I look for both, I try to balance food and price”
- “We care very much where the food is sourced from, purposely budget higher food cost to accommodate local food”

Do you have a nutrition policy or philosophy for your organization? What does this look like? What does it achieve?

Caterers are following guidelines set by the government but those who are passionate about what they are doing, are adding a measure of personalization.

- “Nutrition policy – according to Health Canada, Canada Food Guide, Ontario Nutrition Publication for Health Settings. Target levels for sugar consumption. Philosophy – food needs to be healthy and tasty for the child”
“Importance of quality ingredients coming first. We care about where food comes from, how it is grown, and how it is made. Our seasonal, six week rotating menu is carefully designed by our Certified Nutritionist and we only use the best quality ingredients to ensure all of your child’s nutritional needs are met. It is important for us to support local farmers and we strive to promote the health and well-being of children and youth in our community.”

“Follow PPM150”

“Green Heart Lunch Club owner does all buying, he does not follow guidelines but is passionate about buying local”

“Real Food for Real Kids it is critical we are non-GMO, no pesticides, healthy, innovative, creative, unique”

“Real Food for Real Kids menus are always developed with healthy bodies and delicious taste in mind. We start by analyzing all ingredients to avoid nutrient-void fillers and artificial colours, flavours, and sweeteners. Even our everyday pantry is one to brag about with basics like sea salt, nutritional yeast, dehydrated carrots and maple syrup”

“Once we’ve stacked our ingredient deck, we develop recipes with a goal of reducing total salt, sugar and saturated fat content per meal. By cooking in our own kitchen, we are in control of our recipes as well as the cooking methods used!”

“Yes, it is on our website, food charter, cooking from scratch, healthier option, no food choice is a bad choice, good food for everyone, regardless of income bracket and encourage people to enjoy food and learn about food as much as they can so to make the most informed choice, make sure all recipes are nutritionally sound – don’t talk a lot about nutrition, but enjoyment and cooking. Food is more than fuel, talking about nutrition sometimes turn people off from cooking, 90% of people use pre-packaged foods, so don’t worry too much about what you are cooking just want people to cook. Growing Chefs has a big cooking education program on top of the catering business”
Do you follow/use any nutrition standards or guidelines for your meal planning or food ordering?

Guidelines followed included: Ontario Dietitians in Public Health Menu Planning Guidelines, Canada’s Food Guide, PPM 150. A few mentioned finding them restrictive or needing updating.

- “PPM150 School & Beverage policy, Canada Food Guide and using guidelines set by Windsor Health Unit”
- “Meet government guidelines but this is viewed as very weak and needing updating”
- “The government guidelines are helpful but believe they need to be updated at the federal level. He understands change can be slow but reiterates that changes are needed”
- “They work to their own standards which are higher than the governments”
- “Our hot lunch and snack program exceeds the requirements of the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA) and the City of Toronto Children’s Early Learning and Care Assessment of Quality Improvements (ELCAQI). Our menus are always reviewed & approved by a third party Registered Dietitian”
- “Because we use high quality food the guidelines are easy to exceed or meet”
- “Because the guidelines focus on fat it makes it hard to use cheese in the menu”
- “They set the standard on sizing and portion control as well as quality”

Have you created any standards/guidelines yourself- please describe:

Respondents appear to be personalizing and responding to their client’s needs in establishing guidelines.

- “Yes, trying to avoid ingredients that create allergies, inflammation, behaviour changes in kids”
- “Real Food for Real Kids values nourishment, quality, service, sustainability and legacy.”
- “Change the way children eat and understand food”
- “Provide children with healthy and delicious meals and snacks”
- “Reconnect children and families to real food”
- “Inspire future generations to make healthier choices, every day”
- “Support Ontario farmers and producers who are as committed to responsible and sustainable business practices as we are”
- “Not in policy form but the chefs are to keep stock on hand to under $5000 to keep them from stocking on canned goods, make sure of fresh foods”
- “Menu rarely indicate what fruit / veg they are serving - just say seasonal veg / fruit. Chefs in foodservice are usually expected to reduce food and labour cost to save money and our policy encourages them to spend more time to prep the food rather than cost reduction if it means fresher better foods, look at how to work into the budget if local is available. Lunch program is not for profit – goal is not to increase profit margin. Profit means delivering good food to the kids, delivery whole meals”
- “Yes I am a retired dietitian, I make my own menus and address allergies, special diets and religion”
- “Our "Beet Café" has every recipe posted on web with nutrition breakdown for parents to see – so parents can make at home. We want the kids to carry the eating habit back to home and not just eating well at school / childcare”
Are there any challenges with following any of these standards or guidelines? Are they fairly straightforward, restrictive in any way?

Although they are straightforward, some viewed as restrictive in not forcing better quality food and budgets.

- “Yes - education of food is in the mouth”
- “Budgets are way too small they are given $4.89 per kid per day to work with to supply 2 snacks and a healthy meal”
- “It is helpful, but some time can be restricting. For example: focus a lot on the fat content, making difficult to use cheese”
- “No real challenges, he said the challenge is mainly his competitor and the food that they can offer under the same guidelines. He said that because of the quality of ingredients he uses the guidelines are easy to meet”
- “Yes - challenge – ministry has never seen a lunch program that follows the guideline before, because cooking from scratch is held to a higher standard for food safety and takes huge amount of time to meet all food safety standard, compared to those serving pre-packaged ready to serve meal”
- “Local health unit not used to seeing the staff cooking from scratch and it takes a long time for us to get kitchen procedures to get approval, Growing Chefs Ontario is used as a gold standard, we have 30 clipboards in the kitchen to document all our procedures, and it is 10 times more than regular restaurant and other caterers. Their food inspectors advised us to move to more pre-packaged foods to make it easier for govt. to approve procedures. Food safety, while very important is a huge barrier to stop people from cooking from scratch more so than the cost. Going through process to be certified as safe, should not be a barrier”

How helpful/effective are these standards and guidelines or supporting resources?

They seem to be helpful but viewed as setting a minimum standard.

- “Helpful and plentiful”.
- “They help to define the quality of the food. The portion size and the nutrition requirements.”
- “They are helpful but he strongly believes that they need to be updated on a federal level. He understands change can be slow but reiterates that changes are needed”
- “They are viewed as needing updating and they only scratch the surface on the real food story/need”

How would you define local food? What does local mean to you?

Respondents seem to understand local means Ontario, however not all were clear on the Local Food Act definition. Some took it further and wanted to buy even closer to home to help their local economy.

- “Food grown or manufactured in Ontario”
- “Local means Ontario but one goes by proximity first, meaning that he uses farmers in Essex County where he is from as much as possible. If something is not available in the county he will start to move out farther into the province. Local means “you know where it comes from”. He mentions his relationship with local farmers again”
- “The word is overused and poorly defined”

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
“Local is produced in Ontario but also made in Ontario and the ingredients from Ontario. Define as both”

“Local food – if in season, closest option possible, it is different between locally grown and Ontario grown. Locally grown definition is not fuzzed over by us too much, freshest is our number one goal, most of the time it is sourcing from the farmer that you know”

“There was an issue with the term local can’t use local in your marketing if under 50 km” - apparently can now say local if product is from the Province and 50 km outside the province”

“Canadian Food Inspection Agency investigated RFRK on their claim”

Are any of the foods you source for the meals and snacks served to children locally grown or use local ingredients? OR Does your program utilize local foods/ingredients in the meals and snacks offered to children?

There is a sincere effort to buy local and to buy at least half of the products being purchased being local.

Yes but rather than focusing on "local" we want fresh and good quality. So if sourcing locally means we get fresh and good quality then we will use.

“YES: 55% of food bought is locally grown according to Real Food for Kids”

“Did you know that in 2016, 52% of dollars spent on food served by Real Food for Real Kids was sourced from local and/or organic suppliers?”

“Green Heart almost buys 100% local”

“Absolutely, we have the oldest flour mill in North America in London Ont. Arva Mill - we drive there and pick up all the flour we use”

“From Gordon Food Service supplier – in season from Ontario, or they tell them what options they have if local not available.

“Value of using local food is the relationship with the supplier and understanding their practices and what goes into their products to bring value to the food, connection to the food whether it is local doesn’t take it away from a great product – support local economy and community, asking what is in season, if you have a connection to the actual producer. Know where to order the best food from and they are well connected to their suppliers”

Reasons behind your decision to buy local

There are lots of good reasons to buy local and all caterers seem to acknowledge the multiple benefits.

“Support local economy”

“Food is best from its origin’

“They have an awareness of the benefits”

“Customers are asking for it”

“Offer variety to the children”

“Support farmers, offer variety to children. When in season, usually is cheaper”

“Multiple reasons, support local farmers, easy to have relationship with local suppliers, good for the economy, the shorter the distance the fresher”

A combination of things, Customer asking for better product, better for the community as a whole, better product (pride in what he sells)

We try to get as fresh as possible and mitigate canned goods. We set up good relationships with vendors / suppliers to ensure good quality.

One caterer said, “I don’t buy from foreign countries without the same regulations of Canada”.
Where do you source your local food?

Local food is purchased province wide. If it can be obtained in the local county then that drives a purchase decision for some. A wide range of suppliers was mentioned:

- “I pay local farmers to grown for me”
- In the big food suppliers when they have available.
- Local farmers or companies like Gordon Food Service / Sysco
- Local farmers and farmers markets. No group buying, they have strong buying power and farmers grow for them first then may sell off the rest to markets.
- Have relationship with Patrick Secord at George Brown College – bee hives on the roof project

The Buzz About RFRK's Bees - Real Food for Real Kids
https://rfrk.com/blog/the-buzz-about-bees/
May 18, 2017 - RFRK has partnered with George Brown College Hospitality and Culinary Arts Professor and Ontario Beekeeper, Patrick Secord, to host ...

What local food/ingredients do you use most often?

These respondents are buying anything and everything local (see list below). They are not limiting themselves to only fruits and vegetables.

- “Everything that they can”
- “Menu dictates”
- “Buy from all food groups below locally when available”
- “Fruits, vegetables, meats, breads, cheese”
- Meat / Dairy / Fresh produce (most when it is in season)
- Fresh veggies, fresh fruit, canned / jarred fruit and fruit sauces
- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- also local bakeries (not necessarily using local ingredients)
- bread fresh - tortilla, buns, pasta, rice, quinoa
- mostly poultry

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<th>Served or not Served (Y/N)</th>
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<td>Salad Mix</td>
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<td>Bread - frozen</td>
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<td>Pancake mix</td>
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<td>Cereal – Hot/Oats</td>
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**How do you track local food use?**

For those tracking local food purchases it is based upon the dollars spent. Most don’t have time to track.

- “They don’t track their purchases because so much is local”
- “Do not have time to track, 100% pear, peaches, apples, honey, flour, egg and chicken from local farmers”
- “Tracking is just another steps that utilize resources, people can’t really track % local food, because local food is undefined e.g. cheese curds local producer the nearest producer is from Quebec, but they are good quality so that’s OK”
Challenges or barriers to accessing local food to use in your meal or snack program?

Accessing local food is not the biggest challenge. Pricing may be a limiting factor. As budgets may limit any use of any expensive ingredient.

- No challenges in access to these foods, Growing Chefs
- Can’t meet the criteria of Toronto - city funding for meal programs of $2.50 per day versus the $4.89 Real Food for Real Kids charges.
- They’d love to have fish, and prefer the wild cod fish, but cannot get from Ontario. Much easier over the last 5 years; supply always changes, based on weather impacts; etc. They want no additive products, but the price is high, low supply.
- Ingredients not available or too expensive
- “A lot of time local farmers are not able to deliver and I have no time or means to pick up”
- “The biggest issue for them is just seasonality, in winter prices go up and local gets more expensive”

Opportunities or successes accessing and utilizing local food in your meal or snack program?

Green Heart Lunch Club and Real Food for Kids have both had impact.

- Green Heart Lunch Club actually prepays the farmer to grow what they want. Creating a secure buy local environment. They have been able to provide advanced payment to farmers to grow specifically for them, they have requested product from farmers that the farmers have not grown in the past, Green Heart provided advanced funds to the farmer to allow them to start a new crop. This happened over that past season and ended up being successful for both the farmer and Green Heart.

- Real Food for Real Kids has used their buy local philosophy to help them differentiate themselves from the competition. This philosophy and actual behaviour has garnered media and sales for them.
  - They are selected because of their food program vision/mandate, however these local products can or are seen as higher in cost
  - They have partnered with George Brown College and Sunday Harrison – Urban Farm
  - They were so successful in claiming the buy local claim on their website, the competition reported them and Canadian Food Inspection Agency made a visit. Government has since defined for local which now means within the Province not 100 miles.

Can you tell us why local food/ingredients are not offered in your program?

There is a no, if a caterer is looking to meet their menu requirements. To create certain foods requires ingredients that are not grown in Ontario. “Real Food for Real Kids is looking for the best ingredients, they are looking for ingredients that fit the recipe they want to deliver so they pay what they need or go beyond local suppliers if needed”.

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8 Sunday Harrison - Program Director - Green Thumbs Growing Kids ...
https://ca.linkedin.com/in/sunday-harrison-8a6653a
9 Ontario's Local Food Strategy - www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/localfood.htm
How do you feel about providing local food in your program? OR What is your attitude towards providing local food in your program?

Everyone is positive about local food programs, but it is recognized there are just some ingredients we can’t grow here (e.g. melons, bananas, etc.). Caterers will never be 100% local but there is personal pride that drives it to be at least 60% of their purchases.

- Would love to see more fruits – but it is really seasonal.
- I would like to have the opportunity to serve more. But because I cannot always find it is not that easy.
- Local food is a big community, they use as much local food as possible.

What information, tools or resources do you require to enable your staff or program buyers to incorporate/provide more local food in your meal or snack offerings?

Caterers are open to and very welcoming for support and resources. Both staff training and end user – client training support is desired by these caterers.

- “Anything helps, in Real Food for Real Kids owner is an avid researcher and reader so she tends to create her own materials and dialogue.”
- “Materials that can help train the staff.”
- What can really help is anything that saves them time and money. Many of these not-for-profit organizations don’t even have the time to pick up food from a farm even if they wanted to. They don’t have the internal teams to create programs and then implement them. So something ready-made that can be applied to their businesses would be helpful.
- They also need to be able to personalize and adapt materials. This allows them to not feel that they are not doing something everyone else is doing. But they would feel better about a larger program that helps everyone and especially kids.
- They need to understand where the ingredients are coming from, when contacting “local” suppliers. It is not so easy to get this information; some suppliers are very secretive about it. Buyers should be also aware about the importance and why they need local and they should be educated about that.

How would you define/describe food literacy?

For all the respondents this was not a term that they use regularly in conversation.

- “Food and nutrition knowledge and food skills; being able to distinguish between reliable info and not; trying new foods; food choices; etc.”
- “A combination of general knowledge about nutrition, how to read labels and internet resources”
- “I don’t know how to describe it”
- “He thinks that it revolves around knowing what is in your food, thinks that labels can scare people and there could be a way to simplify food packaging so people can easily tell if something is healthy for them. Food labels can be intimidating or overwhelming”
- “A combination of understanding nutrition knowledge, food skills, food system”
Do you provide any local food literacy training for your staff?

Many of the caterers are doing in-house training. It helps their staff but also helps their staff understand the bigger picture and mission of the catering organization.

- “Internal session for staff about nutrition and healthy eating are provided every quarter formally and daily - informally; also a certified nutritionist is always available to talk to”
- “I do not. I am not qualified to do so”
- “He provides allergy training and ongoing training about local healthy ingredients”
- Yes on both, all staff have safe handler cert, local farm visits (at least twice a year – whole team), 4 – 6 times in small groups to connect with different farms / suppliers. My team is doing professional development – cheese making, heritage grain, pasta making classes,
- “Real Food for Real Kids does training for their own front house staff and go into the facilities they cater to including: speeches and presentations, a newsletter that goes out to subscribers, joint venture partnerships George Brown College, Urban Farms, product samples, media releases, lunch & learn sessions, lunch themes to match seasons e.g. Halloween, contests and promotions, speak to parents one on one, sponsorships, speaking at industry events”

What tools or resources do you use to educate/train staff about local food, nutrition or healthy eating? What tools and resources are most effective? What resources/supports do you need?

Educating/Training:
- Presentations
- Sampling
- Creating a philosophy and using it daily within the business.

Resources/Supports:
- “The info is out there, much of it on government and other websites but it can be hard to access and find. Thinks it should be simpler to access”
- “All need to know how to use the nutrition tools to work out nutrition value – recommended by Brescia College Western University – all three interns we have are nutrition students from Western. We have a partnership with Western”
- Creative caterers are providing all sorts of educational support to educate parents, children and caregivers in childcare facilities. It can be as simple as presentations to newsletters to staff and parents.
- Others have created relationships with urban farmers and bee keepers and obtained media to help spread their message. Some have their own gardens.
- Many are using traditional and social media to get their message out.
- The caterers indicated many ideas and opportunities for education: Real Food for Real Kids, Growing Chefs and Green Heart Lunch Club are living education in each step of their food product development from their purchasing ethics to the materials used to ship the food. They are training staff and physically going into their customers facilities to share their vision of the food they are creating to help kids be healthy and have a great start to their food lives.
- Sysco, Flanagan, and Gordon Food Service are major suppliers of ingredients to caterers. They also have buy local programs and have dietitians and chefs on staff who help to create and or disseminate this information.
Do you integrate ways to increase children’s learning about local and/or healthy foods into your foodservice/catering program? What does that look like? Would you consider adding something like this to the programs you are offering? Any ideas or suggestions?

- Sampling
- Presentations
- Speeches
- Teach their own staff, the caregivers at the facilities they service and with children as well.
- “Workshops for children about healthy and local food; interactive activities; few times a week.”
- “Snack program- fruit and veggie program- the ingredient will be written up on the board in the child’s classroom and the fruit or veggie will be discussed and explained why it is good for you and where it comes from”
- “All of the education program is based on teaching about the food system”

Do you provide any activities related to local food literacy in your foodservice/catering programming that is communicated to the staff, parents or caregivers of the children in the meal or snack program you service?

Several respondents are doing out-reach to their end users to educate and make a difference.

- “Real Food for Real Kids will do anything they can to facilitate the mandate of food education for kids and with care givers and parents”
- “Yes, send newsletters”
- “Yes, train my staff about where the food comes from.”
- “Yes. Hands-on activities with cooking; they offer some ingredients to children to see, feel and touch”
- “I deliver a monthly newsletter with nutrition information to the schools, parents and children”
- “Developing a summer camp program, didn’t really expand on the idea though”
- “Yes, annual meeting with the staff, most of the time focused on getting kids to eat the food they are making, PPM150 cannot repeat the same dishes, there is only so much to rotate through the season, workshops with parents and teachers – to encourage kids to eat the food and more comfortable with different types of food, answer is to teach kids about eating and cooking – educational component”

Is your catering program connected to any food growing programs in the school or community (e.g. community gardens, tower gardens)?

Creative caterers are being innovative and doing what they need to do and know what they can do to bring local items and creativity to meal planning for children.

- “Yes work with an Urban Farm”
- “Yes, work with local farmers and have them grow what we need and want.”
- “Yes we have a beautiful garden – Growing Chefs”
- “Yes, access to community gardens, helped creation of gardens at school”
Are any of the foods grown in these gardens served as part of a meal or snack to children in the program?

- "No. Not easy to make sure for food safety and the demanded volumes"
- "Yes and no, the community gardens serve the kids but the meals in the program are all made at the Green Hearts Lunch Club site with ingredients from farmers"
- "We are not allowed to use any of the ingredients in our food by the ministry."

Are any of the foods grown foods in these gardens used as part of any food literacy/nutrition education for the children in your program?

- "Not today. But if they were asked – that would be great"
- "Yes, teachers will talk to students about what is being grown"
- "Yes, it is only used for educational purposes"

Real Food for Real Kids and Green Heart Lunch Club are using urban farms and farmers to make a difference. Money is not their driver. They are reaching out into their community no matter how big or small and finding a way to do local and make a difference in the health of the children they feed.

- "Yes and media uses these urban farms as well"
- "Green Heart actually has local farmers growing what they need and works directly with them."

What information, tools or resources do your require or would like to be developed to enable your staff to communicate with the parents/caregivers of children in your program about local and healthy food?

A lot of ideas were offered, they are educational in theme and delivery can be done in many ways. There is some suggestion that the government should do it but really the innovation seen at Real Food For Real Kids and Green Heart show what is possible with some passion and creativity supported by a need to make a difference. One thought they use a lot already.

- "It’s enough, the ones are available – are ok; they use those and try to simplify for their users. No need for excessive tools and info”.
- Another said, “I use nutrition month / Health Canada and Ontario Dietitians program as my sources.
- "Better definition in what is local food. Maybe should come from the government but without dictating. For example: the PPM gives no choice for the parents about the food of their kids. Would be better to educate them, so parents would be able to choose correctly, rather than force it”
- "Keep it simple” parents and caregivers should be encouraged to try new things at home. He says it is too easy to just have chicken fingers and fries as a go to. Reinforce having good food at home”
- “Set Food literacy learning benchmarks that are age specific. Design it like Ontario school curriculum, like math or Science etc. Learning outcome need to be established – we don’t have that right now, there is no benchmark to get everyone to measure the standard of what people should know about food literacy, we won’t know how our kids are learning and how much they are learning, nutrition knowledge doesn’t translate to good food knowledge, does not necessarily translate their learning into their diet”
A number of supports were suggested by the caterers:

- “Training programs”
- “Support materials (content)”
- “Do local culinary tours”
- “Iron chef competitions”
- “Use Trent University sustainable program as a resource”
- “Programs that are hands on for kids so they can feel & touch”
- “Workshops for kids about healthy local foods. Interactive activities, few times per week”
- “Access to community gardens”
- “Create school gardens”
- “Government updating guidelines”
- “Government providing resources for educating”

Is there anything else you would like to add?

It appears that the anything else question is about an internal commitment and heart. Not about the facts or numbers. The ownership and creation of a food ethos with our children pretty much sums it up.

- “Home Economics should be added back into school programs”
- “Schools should be like they have in France you cannot open one without a kitchen, today some children eat on the floor in Toronto”
- “We need to create a food ethnic or ethos with our children”
- “Work with clients who see the value in using local and the heart that goes with it, we need to care more”

Summary of Observations & Recommendations

Caterers appear to be passionate about the use of local foods for their customers. Respondents reported that when possible they prefer to use local (Ontario) foods/ingredients.

- The actual purchase of local products all categories can be from 60% of purchases to almost 100% for those caterers working with “for profit” programs.
- All the participants cited multiple reasons for buying local foods including better pricing in season, food quality/freshness and variety, better for children and community as a whole.
- The respondents also used their use of local foods as a point of differentiation and as a marketing resource and tool.

Strengths:

- Local catering companies that provide food to childcare/ school based programs currently use local foods and would like to expand that
- Use of local food is believed to be a positive marketing position
- Caterers work with staff to promote understanding about local food and preference to use local food in their meal offerings
- Caterers have some training opportunities for staff
- Some offer educational activities for children on local food literacy
- Some caterers have dietitians and chefs on staff
Gaps:

- Lack of expertise and resources related to train buyers on local food procurement, implementation of food safety/ safe food handling regulations
- Food program buyers need to understand where the ingredients are coming from when contacting “local” suppliers

Opportunities:

- Learn from caterers such as Real Food for Real Kids, Growing Chefs and Green Heart Lunch Club. They provide ideas and programs that can be adapted and modeled.
- Utilize resources that have been developed and work with caterers to build on these depending on their needs.
- Create a resource website or links or materials and share them with the catering community across the province.
- Work with and utilize food distributors for dissemination. They already have people and programs in place.
**Childcare Providers - Key Informant Findings**

This report provides an overview of the key informant interview responses from providers of licensed child care programs, and programs providing before and after school child care to children in Ontario.

The child care sector is an important player in the Ontario context with respect to the provision of food, and specifically local food. As this is a crucial time in childhood development, food literacy activities and programming can have real influence on local food knowledge, consumption and healthy eating habits. To learn more about the business of providing food in child care centres and how they use food in educating children, eight child care organizations that provided services in Ontario were contacted for a potential key informant interview. Out of those eight, five agreed to be interviewed. The other three contacts were not interviewed due to timing and logistical issues.

The Nutrition Resource Centre conducted the key informant interviews. Those interviewed were contacted by telephone and interviewed for forty-five minutes to an hour each during the month of November 2018.

**Background & Description of Interviewees**

The key informant interviews were primarily conducted with staff in management positions. Of the five child care organizations interviewed, two provided service throughout Ontario. The others serviced the City of Toronto, Ottawa and Chatham-Kent region. While some were in more rural areas, the majority serviced urban/suburban regions. All except one organization were non-profits.

**Type of programs**

All interviewees stated that their organization offered full day and before and after school licensed child care. For some, full day licensed child care comprised the majority of their business. Some organizations served as an agency for licensed home child care.

Others provided care through camps during holidays or non-instructional days (e.g. Professional Development days). Two organizations provided casual or emergency care. All programs offered meals and snacks in accordance with the Child Care Early Years Act, 2016 (CCEYA). Services were provided to children from infancy (e.g. under 6 months) to school-aged children (12 years of age as per the CCEYA, 2016).

The majority of children attending child care were under the age of 7 for all child care providers.
Observations & information shared by interviewees:

Food service operations and food sources

Regarding food preparation, four out of the five Child Care organizations interviewed prepared some food onsite from scratch. For those organizations that did batch cooking, this was done in centralized kitchens at one program site and then the foods were delivered to their other program sites. Where program sites had no facilities to do scratch cooking, minimal preparation (e.g. cutting up fruits and vegetables, uncomplicated breakfast and lunch meals such as toasting bagels, making smoothies or salads) was done on site. One of the five organizations employed a chef for their centralized kitchen.

Regarding food procurement, four out of five child care organizations interviewed used a large supplier/distributor (e.g. Gordon’s Food Service, Sysco, Flanagan) and supplemented this with local grocery store purchases. One organization only sourced food at their local grocer. Three out of the five organizations also used local catering companies, especially if on-site food preparation was not feasible.

Nutrition guidelines, standards, policies or philosophy for meal planning and procuring foods

Child care organizations offer meals and snack in accordance with CCEYA, 2016 based on the number of hours children spend in care (e.g. meals and snacks for full day, snacks for before and after school).

- Some organizations created supporting documentation to assist with adherence to legislation and/or to create a healthy nutritional environment.
- Nutrition philosophies/policies of the child care organizations interviewed generally supported providing healthy, and a variety of foods, reducing nutrients of concern (e.g. sugar, sodium), offering the freshest foods possible, reducing exposure to allergens, meeting the CCEYA, 2016 requirements and meeting the dietary considerations of children.
- Procurement policies tended to consider the broader context of sourcing, purchasing and storing foods (e.g. transparent request for proposals/bid processes, choose local first, safe transportation of foods).
- Child care organizations tended to use other resources (e.g. other guidelines, the internet) for recipe ideas or to include more local food in a safe way.
- Two out of the five child care organizations interviewed were familiar with the Menu planning and Supportive Nutrition Environments in Child Care Settings: Practical Guide and the accompanying Menu Assessment Tool, produced by the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH).

Successes and challenges with using meal planning and food procurement standards and guidelines

Generally, interviewees felt that having guidelines and policies helped to support their vision/mission for providing child care, and challenged their staff to find ways to promote healthy eating. On the flip side, interviewees could readily identify some challenges with having food procurement policies and guidelines.

- The main challenges identified were: parents’ expectations of food offered to children, parents’ nutritional knowledge, parents of children with special dietary needs, compliance with the guidelines (either legislation or internal) by 3rd parties, changes in guidelines/legislation/policies that result in higher costs, and children’s acceptability of foods offered.
About local food

When interviewees were asked about the definition of local food, the most common response was some variation of “food made or produced as close to the corresponding area as possible”, whether it be within 100 km, from surrounding areas, or home grown. Two out of the five interviewees included the province of Ontario in their response.

Local foods were purchased in different ways (through suppliers or at local grocer, or through local farmers or butchers). Those who used suppliers shared that the supplier would indicate on the order forms which foods were locally sourced.

Use of Local Foods

Most common local foods used were vegetables (e.g., tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, salad greens, potatoes, onions, carrots), fruit (e.g. apples), dairy (e.g., milk, cheese, yogurt), meats, grains and legumes (if not local, then produced in Canada). One organization (that has several associations within it) owned a farm and apiary, so they were able to use locally produced honey.

Reasons for buying local

Interviewees explained that by using local foods, they could provide the freshest foods available for children, support the Greenbelt, support the economy, reduce carbon footprint (less travel). In some cases, local food producers may be clients of child care. None of the child care organizations interviewed formally tracked their usage of local foods.

Successes and challenges with using local food

Several of the child care organizations interviewed have gardens on-site and have used some of the foods produced in their meals and snacks served to children, and in food literacy activities.

Each child care organization had different challenges with using local food.

- One interviewee stated that their first priority is regulatory compliance, so incorporating local food was not a top priority considering the recent changes to CCEYA, 2016.
- Other organizations felt that they didn’t have enough capacity to source local food.
- Other challenges identified included limitations with the types of local food offered due to seasonality; concerns with freshness of foods from suppliers when foods shipped are close to the best before date, cost, and lack of reliable transportation (particularly when working with farmers), and meeting parents’ expectations about what foods were offered and served.

Tools and resources that could support increased local food use

All child care organizations interviewed mentioned that there would be opportunities to discuss the importance of local food use during their on-boarding training of staff, and through the communications with staff throughout the year.

- Two organizations mentioned that they have partnered with external organizations to do trainings, such as the Early Childhood Professional Resource Centre or chefs. One organization mentioned they refer to Foodland Ontario’s website and Dietitians of Canada’s unlockfood.ca website.
Most of the organizations said that trainings were focused on healthy eating, and not specific to local food.

One organization felt that having one local food supplier to source food from would greatly increase their local food usage.

About food literacy

When interviewees were asked about “what food literacy means”, some stated that they were familiar with the concept. The most often mentioned components of food literacy were: “knowing where food comes from”, “identifying what is a healthy food”, and “recognizing what it does for our bodies”. One interviewee was not familiar with the concept.

Current training and resources about food literacy for child care staff

In general, staff training would focus on healthy eating, menu planning, and introducing new foods. Of the five interviewees, one mentioned that they provide specific food literacy training to their staff.

- Examples of resources used for the training included education about local food, highlighting the annual “Nutrition Month”, and renting a blender bike from FoodShare.

- Another interviewee stated that staff newsletters contained “food facts”, and pointed out that monthly staff meetings would be used to discuss menu changes and review policies on serving food.

- One interviewee felt that food literacy training is an “area of weakness”, especially for cooks and chefs who have limited time to attend trainings.

- In addition to the resources identified above, other resources and tools most often used for training included Food handler certification/food safety training.

- Another interviewee mentioned that through the Healthy Kids Community Challenge, they received useful information about water consumption and received water bottles.

- In terms of additional supports that would be helpful for food literacy training, interviewees provided examples of topics such as food labels, cooking with beans and lentils, volume cooking from scratch, using your time wisely, how to cook with local ingredients, how to make things tasty for kids, how to increase food intake for marginalized kids, picky eating, and introducing new foods.

- One interviewee mentioned that fact sheets about local food and how to source them would be useful.

Food literacy for children and families

When asked about how child care organizations incorporate food literacy programming into the educational curriculum for children, interviewees mentioned the change in the delivery of the curriculum from “topic-led” to “child-led”. This means that when children show an interest in a particular topic or activity, educators would use this as an opportunity to tie in other components of the curriculum.

- A food literacy activity that was of mentioned by all of the interviewees was the use of a toy (play) kitchen, where children would explore pretending to prepare foods.

- Other activities included growing and gardening activities (e.g., planting and harvesting from outdoor gardens, container gardens, indoor planting, tower gardens, tracking plant growth,
gardening competitions between sites). As long as there were no concerns with food safety, interviewees said that the foods grown in these activities would be used in meals or snacks.

- Two interviewees stated that they adapted or developed their own curriculum that involved building on children’s use of play to learn, and their use of senses to explore food.
- One interviewee explained that they incorporated lessons about reducing food waste as part of their food literacy education.
- Another interviewee reported that school-aged children would be involved in preparing snacks and/or serving food to other children, as long as food safety wasn’t a concern.

Food literacy activities for families were indirectly provided through daily reporting/communications to parent (e.g. daily menu offerings, amount child consumed). Child care organizations are required to have a parent handbook, which would contain information about the nutrition philosophy for Child Care Centre. Where capacity exists, education would be provided to parents about specific food and nutrition topics (e.g., nutrients such as sodium and fibre, sugar sweetened beverages, food safety, portion size).

- One interviewee mentioned that child care staff would be asked about specific dietary considerations, and therefore, the staff needed to know where to refer parents (or have resources available for parents).
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Each interviewee mentioned different challenges with incorporating food literacy activities for children and families, but the most common challenge identified was staff interest and capacity. Interviewees also mentioned that they struggled with a lack of resources, dealing with allergies, sensitivities and special dietary considerations.

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Interviewees had some pertinent suggestions for tools and resources that would support their implementation of food literacy programming. For example, increasing the awareness about local food, and the importance of food literacy among child care staff and parents was identified as very important.

- One interviewee felt that information about how to source local food and promote it would be very useful.
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Summary of Observations & Recommendations

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Strengths:
- Procurement policies tended to consider the broader context of sourcing, purchasing and storing foods (e.g. transparent request for proposals/bid processes, choose local first, safe transportation of foods).
- Interviewees explained that by using local foods, they could provide the freshest foods available for children, support the Greenbelt, support the economy, reduce carbon footprint (less travel).
- Local foods were purchased in different ways (through suppliers or at local grocer, or through local farmers or butchers). Those who used suppliers shared that the supplier would indicate on the order forms which foods were locally sourced.
- The most commonly used local foods were vegetables and fruit, dairy, meat, grains and legumes.

Challenges:
- First priority is regulatory compliance, so incorporating local food was not a top priority.
- Not enough capacity to source local food.
- Limitations with the types of local food offered due to seasonality; concerns with freshness of foods from suppliers when foods shipped are close to the best before date, cost, and lack of reliable transportation (particularly when working with farmers), and meeting parents’ expectations about what foods were offered and served.

Gaps:
- Most of the organizations said that trainings were focused on healthy eating, and not specific to local food.
- One interviewee felt that food literacy training is an “area of weakness”, especially for cooks and chefs who have limited time to attend trainings.

Opportunities:
- All child care organizations interviewed mentioned that there would be opportunities to discuss the importance of local food use during their on-boarding training of staff, and through the communications with staff throughout the year.
- Several of the child care organizations interviewed have gardens on-site and have used some of the foods produced in their meals and snacks served to children, and in food literacy activities.
- Two interviewees stated that they adapted or developed their own curriculum that involved building on children’s use of play to learn, and their use of senses to explore food.
- Having one local food supplier to source food from would greatly increase their local food usage and strengthening relationships with local suppliers and distributors would also help.
- Providing information to increase awareness about local food, and the importance of food literacy among child care staff and parents was viewed as very important.
**Student Nutrition Programs – Key Informant Findings**

This report provides an overview of the key informant interview responses from program managers of student nutrition programs in Ontario.

Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs) offer school-age children and youth nutritious food through breakfast, lunch, and snack programs. The goal of the program is to support learning and healthy development. With over 4500 SNPs across Ontario, supported by 14 regional lead agencies, these programs represent a significant opportunity to learn about local food use and local food literacy in the school setting. To explore the ways SNPs procure food for and engage children and youth in their programs, the program managers for each of the 14 lead agencies were contacted to identify the best person in their organization for a potential key informant interview. Out of those 14, seven agreed to be interviewed. The remaining seven did not respond to the request.

The Nutrition Resource Centre conducted the key informant interviews. Those interviewed were contacted by telephone and interviewed for forty-five minutes to an hour each during the month of November 2018. Below is a summary of those interviews, and some overarching themes about local food and local food literacy.

**Background & Description of Interviewees**

The key informant interviews were primarily conducted with food and logistics coordinators or community development coordinators employed by the lead agency. One interview was conducted with a program manager. The interviewees represented lead agencies that served Central East, Central West, South West and Northern Ontario. Due to the large geographical regions, the SNPs were offered in a mix of urban/suburban, rural and remote communities.

**Type of programs**

SNPs are categorized into breakfast/morning meals, lunch and snack programs, with each offering representing one program type. For the breakfast/morning meal or lunch program, three different food groups were required, where two of the food groups would be vegetables and fruit, and milk and alternatives. For snack programs, two different food groups were required, where one of the food groups would be vegetables and fruit. Most of the interviewees indicated that the majority of programs offered were breakfast or morning meal. In more rural areas, more snack programs were offered. Four out of the seven interviewees stated that schools in their regions offered more than 1 program. It was rare that all three programs (e.g. breakfast/morning meal, lunch and snack) were offered in one school. The majority of programs described by interviewees were offered in elementary schools, and therefore mostly serving young children. The exact number of children seven years of age or younger couldn’t be quantified.
Observations & information Shared by interviewees

Food service operations and food sources

Interviewees indicated that the preparation of food on-site ranged from scratch cooking to very minimal preparation, which was mainly dependent on whether or not the school had kitchen facilities for preparing food, or sufficient capacity to make meals safely.

In terms of sourcing food, interviewees shared that some programs used large suppliers and distributors (e.g. Gordon Food Services, Sysco). Other programs used local distributors (e.g., Evans Wholesale, Loudon Bros.). Some work directly with local suppliers (e.g., Thornloe Cheese, Lock City Dairy, Fortier Beverages, Sweets from the Earth). All interviewees stated that programs sourced food from local grocery stores. Caterers were not generally used due to cost, however, would be used in special circumstances such as using up left over funding, donations from caterers, or to bring in specialty items (e.g. Indigenous foods in the North).

- One interviewee stated that they are involved in group purchasing through MealSource (a not-for-profit food and nutrition procurement program representing the purchasing interests of a number of healthcare and service providers).
- Three of the seven interviewees said that Ontario Student Nutrition Services (partners with industry stakeholders in providing nutritious food to children) supplied food for the programs in their programs.
- Another interviewee mentioned that they were working with their local food hub.
- One interviewee said that they are trying to move towards more bulk purchasing.

Nutrition guidelines, standards, policies or philosophy for meal planning and procuring foods

All interviewees stated that the SNP Nutrition Guidelines, 2016 were used for procuring food, especially regarding the selection of food itself (e.g. food that meets the guidelines).

- One agency has gone as far as to create a brand list to make it very easy to purchase foods that meet the guidelines.
- Some agencies have created additional policies/guidelines around safe transportation of food and for purchasing foods directly from a farmer.

The SNP Nutrition Guidelines have built-in guiding principles that set the stage for serving the healthiest foods possible to support learning, growth and development. While the SNP Nutrition Guidelines provide examples of specific foods that can be served in the program, they also provide examples of foods that do not support healthy growth and development, with a rationale. The SNP Nutrition Guidelines are based on the current version of Canada’s Food Guide (CFG), however some interviewees mentioned that they will refer to CFG directly.

- One interviewee said that, while not addressed directly, the SNP Nutrition Guidelines help SNP providers think through creative solutions in situations where foods that do not meet the guidelines can still be used (e.g. mixing a healthier cereal with one that doesn’t meet the guidelines).
- Several interviewees mentioned that SNPs also need to be aware of school board procurement policies, which can support or hinder procurement for SNPs.
All interviewees said that school-based protocols for allergies and food safety are also very important. Some of the interviewees have worked on creating standards or policies for working with farmers to ensure that the food is safe. Student Nutrition Ontario (the network for all 14 Lead Agencies) has a food safety working group, that partnered with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to create these standards. Some interviewees mentioned that local Public Health Units (PHUs) have worked with lead agencies to develop additional resources as needed. In rural and remote areas where food purchased from a local grocer may travel long distances, interviewees said that safe transportation policies have been developed. In other cases, the individual needs of schools are dealt with on a one-by-one basis, due to the large variation in needs.

Successes and challenges with using meal planning and food procurement standards and guidelines

As mentioned earlier, the SNP Nutrition Guidelines support healthy eating and developing healthy eating behaviours. However, interviewees identified some challenges with the SNP Nutrition Guidelines. Examples of challenges mentioned by the interviewees included:

- The cost of recommended food products in the SNP Nutrition Guidelines.
- Donations from food companies that don’t meet the guidelines.
- Food safety concerns with certain models of food provision (e.g. dairy products in the grab and go or bin styles of delivery).
- Change management (e.g. coordinators, volunteers and children adjusting to changes in the guidelines, getting on board with and understanding rationale behind changes).

About local food

When interviewees were asked about the definition of local food, the concept of “hyper-local” was raised (food grown or produced right in the community), by two of the interviewees. Others mentioned “within 100 km”. Interviewees in Northern Ontario suggested that the term “local” (especially as how it is defined in the Local Food Act, (2013), is a misnomer, as logistically, it is easier and closer in distance to get food from Manitoba, rather than from Southern Ontario.

In terms of sourcing local food, there was a consensus among interviewees that local food was purchased and used if it was feasible (e.g., cost, availability, transportation, and food safety were not major barriers).

- One interviewee shared that their lead agency has a specific program called Tasty Ontario Tuesdays funded by the Greenbelt, designed to increase local food by creating an eight-week menu featuring a food from a local farmer. The children and program staff meet the local farmer and receive fun facts on the local food.
- Another interviewee shared that they work with the local food hub to incorporate more local food into the program.
- Similarly, another interviewee mentioned that they applied for a grant through the Social Services Board to coordinate local produce boxes to be shipped to 34 schools.
- One interviewee mentioned that the Great Big Crunch was their opportunity to incorporate local foods.
Interviewees who stated that they used suppliers said that they will note which foods are local on the order forms.

Use of Local Foods

Local foods typically used in SNPs included: vegetables, fruit, some grains, some meat (but generally meat products were too costly to serve regularly), dairy, eggs, legumes. Two interviewees said that they could procure a muffin and pancake mix made from local grains that meets the guidelines from a local mill. One interviewee in Northern Ontario mentioned that they procure wild rice from Manitoba.

When asked about tracking local food usage, responses were inconsistent.

- Some interviewees mentioned that suppliers would indicate which foods were from local sources, but the information was not necessarily collated or reported on as the Ministry does not require it.
- Other interviewees mentioned a food sharing program that many SNPS regional agencies use (and tailor) that supports build food purchasing from multiple suppliers as well as collecting financial and other SNPS information. The program may track local food usage through receipts from schools using the online program called Webtracker. One interviewee said that their agency was committed to 20% of the foods served coming from local sources.

Reasons for buying local

Interviewees generally mentioned that buying and using local foods is important as they are fresher, usually better quality, and healthier. One interviewee said that supporting the local economy is important to the community – especially if programs are agricultural-rich region. Another interviewee said that using local foods is an “amazing opportunity” to educate students about where foods come from.

Successes and challenges with using local food

As evidenced by the interviewees’ responses about their sources of local food, there are some initiatives that work well, but they are few and far between. The Great Big Crunch is one initiative that interviewees used to promote local food usage.

- One interviewee said that their local food hub has strong relationships with the local grocery stores and will often get discounts on and donations of local food.
- The same interviewee said that lead agency is looking at taking the purchasing of food at the local level out of the hands of the schools, so that they could help mitigate the rising costs of vegetables and fruit.
- Another interviewee mentioned that their lead agency works with the local public health unit to educate school coordinators and volunteers about the importance of local food.

However, interviewees stated that there are significant barriers to incorporating local food.

- Examples of barriers included: the rising cost of foods, the lack of sufficient funding to properly support local food usage for all schools, food safety issues/concerns with procuring foods from local farmers, the inability to get a standing order to make it worthwhile, and the fact that some schools don’t have the facilities for storage or for preparation of food.
A few interviewees mentioned that transportation of local foods (directly from local sources) is an issue as the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) funding does not cover this cost.

One interviewee mentioned the SNP is not the main priority as school staff and volunteers are running the program.

Another interviewee shared that there are issues with produce from community and school gardens as they may not be safe or inspected by public health.

Another challenge mentioned by one interviewee was the difficulty to focus on local food with a limited budget to feed as many children as possible.

**Tools and resources that could support increased local food use**

When asked about what tools and resources would support local food usage in the SNPs, interviewees responses were quite broad. It was clear that some agencies were already doing as much as they could, and that some were interested in doing more.

- One interviewee shared that their lead agency is working on a project that would involve developing a website with resources that would connect the schools with local farmers.
- Other interviewees said that they would continue the initiatives already in place (e.g. local food boxes shipped to schools, Tasty Ontario Tuesdays).
- One interviewee mentioned that their lead agency worked with a student to create a cookbook using foods featured as part of Tasty Ontario Tuesdays.
- Another interviewee shared that their lead agency is attempting to work with farmers to come up with solutions to get more local food into the program.
- Examples of other tools to increase local food usage mentioned by interviewees included salad bars, having a simple brochure promoting local food, sharing tips in email communications with program staff and volunteers, reducing structural barriers to selling more local food in grocery stores, making it easier for farmers to become certified, a process for centralized distribution, including refrigerated trucks.

**About food literacy**

When interviewees were asked about “what food literacy means”, almost all mentioned that they were familiar with the concept. The most often mentioned component of food literacy was “knowing about food”. One interviewee was not familiar with the concept.

**Current training in food literacy for child care staff**

As lead agencies cannot use their provincial funding for food literacy activities or programming, interviewees shared that their lead agencies often partnered with others (most often PHUs) to train staff and volunteers. One interviewee mentioned that lead agencies do not have to report their staff training activities to the Ministry.

- One interviewee explained that since their lead agency is rooted in the PHU, it is easier to leverage other staff (e.g. health educators) to go to schools to provide information and training.
- The same interviewee stated that the PHU is well connected to other organizations and initiatives that support food literacy (e.g., Metro Green Apple grant, OPHEA certification, Bright Bites).
Interviewees that mentioned working closely with PHUs also shared that the Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC) (formerly funded by MOHLTC) partnerships had helped to support local food literacy.

**Food literacy for children and families**

As mentioned above, providing food literacy for children or families is not within the mandate or funded by MCCSS. However, the Healthy Kids Community Challenge was an opportunity to implement food literacy activities for the children directly.

- One interviewee shared that their local PHU will do presentations for children and families.
- Another interviewee stated that in their region, teachers volunteer to run the SNPS, so they have an easier time linking to the curriculum.
- Another interviewee mentioned that students in the Life Skills program help to increase the capacity for schools to do some food literacy activities such as food demos and preparing foods from a farm for salad bar.
- The same interviewee felt that schools that have a good support system have been able implement some programming, but capacity is still a major issue.
- Another interviewee shared that a school in their region has dedicated a whole classroom to the SNPS, where students help to prepare and serve food.
- Other community programs such as Roots to Harvest, You’re the Chef, Kids in the Kitchen, and Bright Bites were mentioned by interviewees as ways to provide food literacy.
- One interviewee shared that an SNPS-type summer program to provide food for children is a need in their region.

In terms of growing activities, most of the interviewees said that schools seem to have some kind of growing activities (e.g. school gardens, tower gardens, community garden, farm to cafeteria salad bar), but these initiatives are school activities, and not necessarily part of the SNPs. Due to food safety concerns, foods from school growing activities were generally not served in the program, but could be used for food literacy activities.

Food literacy activities for families were mostly school initiatives. Interviewees mentioned that parents would receive communications from the school about the SNPs to raise awareness, also to solicit fundraising.

- One interviewee shared that some schools in their region have taken this opportunity to send home information about health and nutrition, but not necessarily local food.
- One interviewee who lead agency is rooted in the PHU has been asked to attend parent council events.
- Another agency is undertaking a project to provide food literacy programming to parents and their children that included cooking foods, menu planning and food safety education.

**Challenges with incorporating food literacy**

Each interviewee mentioned different challenges with incorporating food literacy activities for children and families, but the most common challenge identified was lack of capacity in schools to provide food literacy activities and that SNPs are not mandated to implement food literacy.

- One interviewee mentioned reaching parents (particularly in remote areas) can be challenging.
Other challenges mentioned by interviewees included funding and figuring out what aspects of food literacy to prioritize.

**Tools and resources to support the implementation of food literacy programming**

Interviewees generally supported the need to provide food literacy. One interviewee said that opportunities exist as there is a growing need to educate about food and the food environment, particularly as more food products are available now more than ever. Most interviewees agreed that increased funding to do more programming and implement additional or expand on current initiatives (e.g. local food boxes, increase partnerships) is needed.

- One interviewee felt having more school board support, or a champion would be helpful.
- Another interviewee mentioned that local food promotion (e.g. brochures, videos and other communications to communities and families) would be useful.
- Other examples of tools and resources to increase food literacy included advocacy for overcoming barriers to getting local food to schools in a safe way, increasing food literacy programming in the curriculum, instituting more policies to implement local food in the school setting and advocating for a national school breakfast program.

**Summary of Observations & Recommendations**

There was a consensus among interviewees that local food was purchased and used if it was feasible (e.g., cost, availability, transportation, and food safety were not major barriers). Local foods typically used in SNPs included: vegetables, fruit, some grains (e.g. muffin and pancake mix), some meat (but generally meat products were too costly to serve regularly), dairy, eggs, legumes. One interviewee in Northern Ontario mentioned that they procure wild rice from Manitoba and that local food for them included sourcing from Manitoba, which is geographically closer to them than southern Ontario.

**Strengths:**
- Using local foods was generally seen as important as they are fresher, usually better quality, and healthier, and important to the local economy/community – especially if programs are agricultural-rich region.
- Using local foods was noted as an “amazing opportunity” to educate students about where foods come from.
- Three of the seven interviewees said that Ontario Student Nutrition Services (partners with industry stakeholders in providing nutritious food to children) supplied food for the programs in their programs. One program partners with MealSource
- Lead agency works with the local PHU to educate school coordinators and volunteers about the importance of local food.
- Student Nutrition Ontario has a food safety working group, that partnered with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to create standards.

**Challenges:**
- Examples of barriers included: the rising cost of foods, the lack of sufficient funding to properly support local food usage for all schools, food safety issues/concerns with procuring foods from local farmers, the inability to get a standing order to make it worthwhile, and the fact that some schools don’t have the facilities for storage or for preparation of food.
Gaps:
- Lead agencies cannot use their provincial funding for food literacy activities or programming, therefore they often partnered with others (most often PHUs) to train staff and volunteers.
- Schools that have a good support system have been able to implement some food literacy programming, but capacity is still a major issue, and food literacy is a low priority/not mandatory for schools.

Opportunities:
- The Great Big Crunch was mentioned as an opportunity to incorporate and educate about local food.
- Group purchasing, for example through MealSource (a not-for-profit food and nutrition procurement program representing the purchasing interests of a number of healthcare and service providers).
- Working closer with local food hubs, who have strong relationships with the local grocery stores and will often get discounts on and donations of local food.
- Scaling up food sharing projects and utilizing the online software Webtracker program that tracks local food usage by dollar amount through receipts from schools for use across Ontario.
- Lead agencies working with farmers to come up with solutions to get more local food into the program.
- Programs and resources that connect the schools with local farmers e.g. local food boxes shipped to schools, Tasty Ontario Tuesdays, salad bars, brochures promoting local food, emails communications with program staff and volunteers,
- Reducing structural barriers to selling more local food in grocery stores, making it easier for farmers to become certified, a process for centralized distribution, including refrigerated trucks.
- Students in the Life Skills program help to increase the capacity for schools to do some food literacy activities such as food demos and preparing foods from a farm for salad bar.
- Work with community programs such as Roots to Harvest, You’re the Chef, Kids in the Kitchen, and Bright Bites to provide food literacy.
APPENDIX 1

Online Survey for SNPs and Child Care Centres – Summary of Results

The online survey asked a number of questions of student nutrition program (SNP) and child care program managers and/or staff to understand the situation in their program with respect to local food and food literacy. This was to gather more information directly from programs beyond the key informant surveys.

Who responded to the online survey?

There were a total of 213 respondents in the survey. The survey results were divided into two results areas, with more SNPs responding to the survey than child care programs:

- SNP responses included Ontario SNPs, as well as other meal and snack programs offered in school or community setting = 128 (60% of total respondents)
- Child Care responses included all licensed child care programs, recreational camps and other responses = 85 (40% of respondents)

Most of the programs were not for profit. The majority of SNPs responses were from Central West, followed by South West Ontario. More respondents for child care were from Eastern Ontario followed by Central West Ontario and the greater Toronto area (GTA). The majority of SNPs and child care respondents were from urban/suburban areas. The age range of children served in SNPs was highest for children ages 8 to 12 but was similar to the children ages 4 to 7 and youth over 12 which is consistent with majority of programs being offered in schools. Child care programs served a higher percentage of children under the age of 4 (85%), followed by children ages 4 to 7 (65%), then ages 8 to 12 (55%).

Access to Local Food

Local grocery stores (90%) followed by food supplier/distributor (60%) and big box stores such as Costco (43%) were indicated by the SNPs as the places they access food for their program. The Ontario Student Nutrition Services (33%) and farm/farmer (28%) were indicated by about one-third of respondents. Other mentions were donations, Niagara Nutrition Partners, Kawartha Food Share, Organic Kids (vendor).

Local grocery stores (79%), followed by food suppliers/distributors (48%) and caterers (34%) were indicated by the child care respondents as the places they access food for their program. About 20% also mentioned big box stores such as Costco. Eight respondents mentioned community or school garden, while only six mentioned food hub, co-op or distribution centre and five respondents indicated farm/farmer. Other mentions were Walmart, backyard garden, school cafeteria, Organic Kids (vendor), local butcher, Halal butcher, local dairy.

When asked who supplies most of the food for their program, SNPs mention local grocery stores (56%), followed by food suppliers/distributors (28%). The majority of food for child care programs are supplied by local grocery stores (47%) followed by caterers (27%) and food suppliers/distributors (20%).

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
The majority of SNPs do not participate in group buying although 28% indicate they do and just 19% don’t know. 78% of child care programs do not participate in group buying, while 10% do some group buying and 12% don’t know.

**Procurement and Menu Planning Guidelines**

The majority of SNPs (>80%) have procurement guidelines for foods served in their programs, while about 10% don’t know. The majority of child care programs (~60%) have procurement guidelines for foods served in their programs, while about 25% don’t know. The majority of SNPs and child care programs (almost 60%) have guidelines for local food.

- Most SNPs (91%) follow the Student Nutrition Program Guidelines. Forty percent also follow food safety and safe food handling guidelines and 31% follow the PPM 150 School Food and Beverage Policy.
- The majority of child care programs (74%) follow the Ontario Early Years Act, 2014 nutrition requirements of food and drinks. Just over half also indicated they follow food safety or safe food handling guidelines. Child care programs are also following the ODPH’s Menu Planning and Supportive Nutrition Environment in Child Care Settings Practical Guide (36%) and Self-Assessment Tool for Child Care Settings (29%).

**Attitude toward local food**

Most SNPs and child care respondents feel that providing local food in their program is very or somewhat important. If given the opportunity, the majority of SNPs and child care programs would like to incorporate more local food into their program.

- SNPs want to support local business/farmers/community and/or teach children to do so. They also mention cost is a barrier, that local food is higher quality/fresher/healthier. Local food is nice to have, but not the main priority.
- Child care programs want to support local business/farmers/community and/or teach children to do so. They also mention local food is higher quality/fresher/healthier but cost is a barrier for some. Local food is also better for the environment. Some use local food to teach children where food comes from.

**Use of Local Food in meals and snacks**

The majority of SNPs and child care programs provide local food/ingredients in the meals and snacks offered to children.

- The top reasons SNPs use local foods in their meal and snack programs are: helps the local economy, local farmers, local producers; better quality, freshness, taste; can use foods in season/seasonality.
- The top reasons child care programs use local foods in their meal and snack programs are: helps the local economy, local farmers, local producers; better quality, freshness, taste; can use foods in season/seasonality.
- The local foods/ingredients used most often:
  - SNPs: fruit; vegetables; milk, cheese, yogurt; eggs; and grain products.
  - Child care programs: fruit and vegetables; milk, cheese, yogurt; eggs; grain products and meat.
**Successes or opportunities using local food**

The top two successes and opportunities mentioned by SNPs were: apples supplied from local orchards; and local availability via markets/stores/distributors/farmers. The top two successes and opportunities mentioned by child care programs were: local availability via markets/stores/distributors/farmers/etc.; and food literacy/local food literacy education.

**Challenges and barriers to using local food**

The top challenges or barriers to obtain and use local food mentioned by SNPs were: lack of consistent local food availability; local food costs too much; lack of local suppliers; local food supplier/farmers don’t deliver small orders; and lack of staff or volunteers to prepare local food.

The top challenges or barriers to obtain and use local food mentioned by child care programs were: lack of consistent local food availability; local food costs too much; and local food supplier/farmers don’t deliver small orders.

**Supports required to increase use of local food**

- SNPs mentions: Financial support/Lower prices and more information on where to access, delivery to site, and increased staff/volunteers.
- Child Care mentions: Financial support/Lower prices; provision of local foods through existing supplier/easier availability (e.g. through one source); more information on where to access; and delivery to site.

**Food literacy education and activities**

Almost half (45%) of SNPs do not provide any food literacy education or activities, while 31% do, and 20% don’t know. Over half (52%) of child care programs provide food literacy education or activities, while 29% do not, and 15% don’t know.

The majority of SNPs feel that food literacy is somewhat important, while less than 30% of SNPs feel it is very important. Food literacy was felt by SNPs to be important to connect students to the community/food system and to help children eat healthier. However SNPs mention they did not have time to incorporate food literacy or have the staff or volunteers to do this. Some felt that students would not be interested, and this it is not part of their mandate.

- Children were mentioned as a target for food literacy by all SNPs followed by parents and cooks or meal preparers, ECE/teachers, program administrators and food purchasers.
- Healthy eating in general followed by food safety were the top topics mentioned for training by SNPs followed by meal planning, budgeting, using local food, portion sizes and nutrition needs of children, etc.
- Education or activities about healthy eating for children and participating in the *Great Big Crunch* and tasting or preparing foods for children were the top food literacy education or activities mentioned by SNPs.
The majority of SNPs were not connected to food growing programs but some were connected to school or community gardens. Some food grown in these programs was served to children as part of a meal or snack, and food grown was also used in food literacy activities.

There is more support for food literacy programming in child care programs where almost 50% of respondents feel that food literacy is very important and about 45% feel it is somewhat important. Food literacy was felt to be important to connect students to the community/food system and to help children/families eat healthier. However, child care programs mentioned they do not have educational resources to do this/staff do not have the knowledge and that it is not the most important priority.

Children were mentioned as a target for food literacy by all child care respondents followed by ECE/teachers, parents, cooks or meal preparers, program administrators and food purchasers. Nutritional needs of children, healthy eating in general, food allergies & intolerances, portion sizes for children, food safety, using local food, etc. were mentioned as the topics included in food literacy training in child care programs. Education or activities about healthy eating for children including growing or harvesting foods, or tasting or preparing foods for children, sensory/exploratory activities about food and local foods for children and local were the top activities mentioned by child care. Education activities and newsletter communication to parents were mentioned. Visits to local farms, farmers’ markets or food production facilities were also mentioned.

The majority of child care programs were not connected to food growing programs but some were connected to school or community gardens and some to tower gardens or indoor growing systems. Some food grown in these programs was served to children as part of a meal or snack, and food grown was also used in food literacy activities.

Successes or opportunities providing food literacy and local food literacy

Few successes were mentioned by SNPs. These included students/families have learned about nutrition/begun eating healthier and students have been able to try new foods, students have been able to save money on food, learned more about how food is grown and gained greater connection to their food.

A few successes were mentioned by child care programs, these included: children have learned more about how food is grown/participated in growing their own food, children have increased interest/skills in food preparation, children/parents have enjoyed recipes, visits from local farmers and support from management.

Challenges to providing food literacy and local food literacy

The biggest challenge to provide food literacy in SNPs was not enough time, mentioned by over 60% of respondents, followed by no one trained to do so (34%), no funding available (22%) and not a priority/no interest (20%). The biggest challenges to provide food literacy in child care were not enough time (40%), and no one trained to do so (38%), and no funding available (31%).
**Supports required to increase local food literacy**

Supports mentioned by SNPs to enable local food literacy included: educational resources (especially curriculum-based), education/training for staff, help from outside experts, funding, more staff/volunteers, more time in the program, etc. Supports mentioned by child care programs to enable local food literacy included: education/training for staff, educational resources appropriate for young children and/or parents, funding, help from outside experts, more time in the program.
Environmental Scan – Summary of Results

What is food literacy? Why is it important?

Healthy eating is vital for the healthy development and growth of children (Farmer et al., 2016). Research has shown that early child care education and programming have significant short and long-term effects on a child’s development (Farmer et al., 2016). Over the past few years, early childhood educators (ECEs), teachers, staff and volunteers who work in or with childcare settings have played an increasingly significant role in developing healthy habits in children. This is reflected in the increased licensed child care spaces in Ontario, which has more than doubled between 2003 and 2018 and renewal of child care legislation which addresses topics such as healthy eating (Government of Ontario, 2014). Furthermore, there has also been an increased push for food literacy to be embedded into the school curriculum by various organizations including OPHA, ODPH, the Ontario Home Economics Association and Dietitians of Canada, the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group, and the Helderleigh Foundation.

Food literacy plays a role in helping individuals make decisions around healthy eating. Food literacy is a combination of 12 interconnected attributes that make up five main categories: food and nutrition knowledge, food skills, self-efficacy and confidence, ecological (external) factors, and food decisions (Locally Driven Collaborative Project (LDCP) Healthy Eating Team, June, 2018). The first four categories all work together on influencing food decisions (LDCP Healthy Eating Team, 2018). The 12 attributes that make up food literacy consists of food knowledge, nutrition knowledge, food and nutrition language, food skills, nutrition literacy, food and nutrition self-efficacy, cooking self-efficacy, food attitude, food systems, social determinants of health, socio-cultural influences and eating practices, and dietary behaviour (LDCP Healthy Eating Team, 2018).

What is the purpose of this report?

This environmental scan, aimed to identify resources that were being used by or desired by food providers and educators of young children to learn about including local and healthy foods into meal and snack programs as well as food literacy activities that target childhood educators, cooks, health intermediaries, young children and their parents and caregivers.

Method

Resources were requested and searched for between September 3, 2018, and September 28, 2018. For resources to be included in the environmental scan, the resources had to be relevant to the following target audiences: parents and caregivers of children aged 4-7, children (4-7 years), ECEs, food providers (including cooks and caterers who prepare meals and snacks), food distributors, and student nutrition program staff or volunteers.
Resources were gathered through two main methods:

1. Internal scan and collection of resources and resources shared by Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) staff - snowball. Several NRC staff shared resources and web links that focused on various aspects of food literacy. From these shared resources, the snowball method was used to identify additional resources. In addition, a partial review of the NRC Navigator was conducted with the key term “food literacy”. The first eight pages of resources were reviewed.

2. External scan of resources – surveys/emails: Two surveys were utilized in this environmental scan to help determine what types of resources are used by 1: early childhood education (ECE) program administrators/faculty and 2: resources used or developed by dietitians, marketing boards and other food literacy stakeholders. Ontario’s 24 community colleges with an ECE program were contacted by one of our advisory committee members and were asked to complete the ECE resource survey. The second Food Literacy Resource Survey was sent to Ontario Federation of Agriculture’s 6x16 partners, to Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) workgroups (food literacy, school nutrition and child care) and then shared with the entire ODPH listserv, and was also shared in Sustain Ontario’s Good Food Bite newsletter.

Curriculum-Linkages

During the preliminary search for resources, several documents indicated that the developed resource was curriculum linked. Given the range of resources developed, and recent changes to the Ontario education curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018), the two most recent kindergarten program and Ontario health and physical education curriculum were compared. Upon reviewing the learning goals and expectations described in The Kindergarten Program 2010-2011 and 2016, as well as the Health and Physical Education Curriculum 2010 (Interim Edition) and 2015, no differences in the learning goals or expectations were found between the two different editions of the documents. Minor differences noted between the two documents were in the examples used to describe how an expectation could be met or how a child would exhibit their learning through conversation, as well as the re-arrangement of the order of the expectations related to healthy eating. A brief outline of the key expectations as stated in the curriculum is included in Table 1.
### Table 1: Food Literacy Topics in Kindergarten, and Grade 1 to Grade 3 Health and Physical Education Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big Idea:</strong> demonstrate a sense of identity and a positive self-image  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Expectations</strong> Identify and talk about own interest and preferences (e.g., food preferences)  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Big Idea:</strong> As children progress through the kindergarten program, they demonstrate an awareness of their own health and well-being  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Concept Understanding</strong> ‘Healthy food choices affect my body and my feelings’  &lt;br&gt;‘I am learning to make healthy choices and to be physically active, in order to keep my body healthy and safe, and to grow strong.’  &lt;br&gt;<strong>Expectations</strong> Demonstrate an understanding of the effects of healthy, active living on the mind and body  &lt;br&gt;Investigate the benefits of nutritious foods (e.g., nutritious snacks, healthy meals, foods from various cultures) and explore ways of ensuring healthy eating (e.g., choosing nutritious food for meals and snacks, avoiding foods to which they are allergic)  &lt;br&gt;Practise and discuss appropriate personal hygiene that promotes personal, family, and community health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Grade 1 – Healthy and Physical Education† |
|---|---|
| **C1 – Understanding Health Concepts**  <br>C1.1 – Food for healthy bodies (Why people need food for healthy bodies)  <br>C2 – Making Healthy Choices  <br>C2.1 – Food group on Canada’s Food Guide and use to make healthy food choices  <br>C2.2 – Know and recognize cues to hunger, thirst, and feeling of fullness. Explain how they can use cues for healthy eating habits |

| Grade 2 – Health and Physical Education† |
|---|---|
| **C1 – Understanding Health Concepts**  <br>C1.2 – Identify common food allergies and sensitivities and potential reactions  <br>C2 – Making Healthy Choices  <br>C2.1 – Use Canada’s Food Guide to assess the nutritional value of a meal. Also, identify food and beverage options that enhance growth and development  <br>C2.2 – Understanding how to make healthy food choices (meals and snacks), and consider factors that are within and beyond the individual’s control |

| Grade 3 – Health and Physical Education† |
|---|---|
| **C1 – Understanding Health Concepts**  <br>C1.1 – Understanding of food origins and how it affects nutrition as well as its environmental impact  <br>C2 – Making Healthy Choices  <br>C2.1 – Understanding of the importance of good oral health and how food choices affect oral health  <br>C3 – Making Connections for Healthy Living  <br>C3.1 – Explain how local fresh foods and food from different cultures can be used to expand healthy choices |

Results

A total of 222 resources were captured in the environmental scan, and 179 unique resources were identified from the scan and survey results after duplicates and resources that did not meet parameters or reference a specific resource were excluded.

The most common category of authors who developed the food literacy resources identified are from government organizations and agencies (47 of 179, 26.3%), non-profit organizations or charities (46 of 179, 25.7%) and public health units (39 of 179, 21.8%). Common authors based on category include: government – Government of Canada, Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada and Alberta Health Services; non-profit organization/charity – FoodShare, Little Green Thumbs, NRC, and Ophea; and public health units – Hamilton Public Health, Hasting Prince Edward Public Health and Middlesex London Public Health. Other categories included marketing boards, working groups, museums, education institutions, researchers, Dietitians of Canada, textbooks and food literacy educators. See Table 2 for the breakdown of resources based on author category.

Table 2: Number of Resources by Author Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Profit/Charity</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Unit</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Board</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Group*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum (Canada Agriculture and Food Museum)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Institution</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietitians of Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Working group includes professional associations such as Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) formerly known as Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPSPH), and a collaboration of government agencies, non-profit organizations and professional work groups.

**Other includes food literacy educators (Janet Nezon) and early childhood education program textbooks.

Resources gathered were also analyzed based on their target audience (children (4-7 years), parents and caregivers, childcare service providers and educators, and health professionals and/or public health units). An “other” category was also included as two resources identified did not fit or only address the target groups. These resources also addressed government and policy makers as well as individuals who are considering culinary school or management programs. See Table 3 for more information on the number of resources by target audience.

Table 3: Number of Resources by Target Audience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childcare service provider and educators (including cooks, food suppliers and distributors)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent and caregiver</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professionals and public health units</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (4-7 years)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes duplicates as some resources address multiple targeted groups

**Other includes government/policy advisors and college applicants to culinary school/management

Local Food Use and Food Literacy
Upon reviewing the identified resources, the results were categorized into eight different types of resources: classroom activity/educator guide (includes lesson plans), recipe and cookbooks, tip sheet or information booklet not directed towards educators, workshop or presentation, webpage, resource list, program guide/manual, and other. Of the 179 unique resources, a significant portion of the resources identified were targeted at educators. 53 of 179 resources were either classroom activity/lesson plans or an educator’s guide for healthy eating or raising preschoolers. Another common type of resource identified was resource lists. These were documents or web pages that provided links or information to additional resources from credible sources such as Health Canada’s Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide or Ministry legislation for licensed child care settings (i.e. Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 Licensing Standards.) Another significant type of resources identified in the environmental scan were resources that fell under the ‘other’ category, which included menu planning tools directed to educators, program guides or manuals, videos, textbooks, research articles and reports, and screening and assessment tools. A total of 5 resources could not be identified as these resources required a valid school teacher registration to access them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Type of Resource Identified in the Environmental Scan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Activity/Educator’s Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tip Sheet/Information Booklet*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webpage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipe/Cookbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop /Presentation (i.e. PowerPoint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Guide/Manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not directed to educators

**Other resources identified include program guide/manuals, videos, textbooks, research dissemination (articles and reports), screening tools, menu planning guides for educators.

Resources were also analyzed for their content. The most common topic covered in these resources was healthy eating. Resources often covered one aspect of healthy eating, such as eating fruit and vegetables, healthy snack options or *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*. Other common topics covered by authors included recipes, nutrition education (e.g., teaching children about healthy eating) and nutritional needs of children. Additional topics that were also covered by the resources included food systems, healthy eating/feeding environment, feeding challenges, gardening tips, mandatory policies and legislation, and after school programming and interventions. See Table 5 for the full list of topics covered.
Table 5: Topics Covered in the Identified Resources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Coverage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy eating</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipes</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition education (e.g., teaching children about healthy eating)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local foods</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional needs of children</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food safety</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition labelling/Nutrition Facts Table</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food allergies &amp; intolerances</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menu development</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portion sizes for children</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Resources that fell under the category of “resource list” were omitted in this table. Several resources covered several topics and were included in several categories.**Additional topics covered included food systems, healthy eating/feeding environments, challenges during feeding, gardening, special diets, after-school healthy eating programs/interventions, cooking skills, call to action, explanation of nutrients, disease prevention, mandatory policies, well-being, and occupational health and safety.

Compared to the analysis of all the resources identified in the environmental scan, results of the early childhood educator survey were further analyzed and revealed slightly different results. A total of 27 submissions were received from early childhood education program administrators. Only 26 were analyzed, and the one submission that was omitted was due to the lack of details from the form and the specific resource referenced. There was some overlap with the resources included in the environmental scan and by the second survey to food literacy partners, however, 13 unique resources were submitted by the ECE program administrators (see Table 6). Two resources that are widely used to educate future early childhood educators were Healthy Foundations in Early Childhood Setting 5th Edition (textbook) by Barb Pimento and Deborah Kernested and Ontario’s Ministry of Education Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 Licensing Standards.

Table 6. Unique resources submitted by ECE administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of resource</th>
<th>Author(s) of resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buy Algoma, Buy Fresh</td>
<td>Rural Agri-Innovation Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada’s Food Guide</td>
<td>Health Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook up some fun</td>
<td>Algoma Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Nutrition Source - <a href="https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/">https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/carbohydrates/</a></td>
<td>Harvard TH Chan; School of Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Foundations in Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Barbara Pimento and Deborah Kernested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23 responses were gathered in the second Food Literacy Resource survey. Of the 23 responses, 22 were resources that were included in the environmental scan, while the remaining one was a response on resource development. The majority of the respondents were dietitians who submitted resources used at their public health units. Other respondents included marketing boards, a food literacy educator (Janet Nezon), and a not-for-profit organization. Most of the submitted resources were for parents and caregivers, followed by childcare educators and providers. Sixteen of the 22 resources were evidence based, while the remaining six resources, that were not evidence based, were cookbooks and recipe cards. The one response on resource development indicated that the marketing board would consider providing resources to promote healthy eating and local food consumption in various age groups including children, teens, parents and caregivers as well as for child care providers.

Local Foods

An important part of this environmental scan was to identify whether or not there were any resources available to educate childcare educators and service providers, as well as parents and caregivers on local food literacy.

Of the 179 unique results, only 25 resources were found to highlight or reference local foods. See Table 7 for the list of identified resources in the environmental scan that referenced local foods. The most prominent authors that referenced local foods were FoodShare (2 resources), Middlesex-London Health Unit (2 resources), Ophea (2 resources), ODPH (2 resources), Nutrition Resource Centre (2 resources), and Foodland Ontario (entire web site focused on promoting Ontario grown produce). Other authors that developed resources that focused on local food include were marketing boards (e.g., VeggieMania by Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario). Specific resources that primarily focused on local foods were Middlesex-London Health Unit’s Get Fresh...Eat Local, and Grown Local lesson plan by Ophea. Another local food resource that was identified in the environmental scan was the Buy Algoma, Buy Fresh webpage, which provides a list of suppliers in the Algoma region which child care providers can utilize to source local foods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Name</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buy Algoma, Buy Fresh</td>
<td>Rural Agri-Innovation Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected to community</td>
<td>Ophea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook It. Try It. Like It! A Guide for Program Leaders</td>
<td>Interior Health Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Education Program</td>
<td>Dairy Farmers of Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat Right Be Active: A Guide for Caregivers of Preschoolers Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Nutrition Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg Farming Learning Package</td>
<td>Egg Farmers of Canada and Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding Your Toddler (1-3)</td>
<td>FoodShare (Jennifer Schneider, RD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Fresh...Eat Local Fourth Edition</td>
<td>Middlesex-London Health Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grown Local</td>
<td>Ophea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Foundations in Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Barbara Pimento and Deborah Kernested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love to Cook and Play Program Manual 2016</td>
<td>Ottawa Public Health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Synthesis/Opportunities**

The environmental scan showed that the majority of the resources identified targeted childcare educators and service providers.

- The most common resources identified were lesson plans, classroom activities, worksheets and teaching guides, which are more targeted to ECEs.
- There was a lack of resources addressing the needs of other childcare service providers such as cooks, food suppliers and childcare managers.
- There was only one resource targeted to food suppliers, the “Buy Algoma” website. This presents an opportunity for resource development to address this particular subgroup who may require more education and information around food literacy.

The analysis also showed that there was a lack of resources specifically for children four to seven years old. While some worksheets and activities were created with these children in mind, most of these resources were usually a component of a practical guide, lesson plan or toolkit for educators.

- This gap in resources could be because children at this age need more sensory, tactile and participatory experiences with food and there could be other ways (e.g. farm tours, gardening, hands on food activities) to expand their knowledge around local food literacy and healthy eating. Children between the ages of four and seven have a wide range of literacy levels, and this presents a great opportunity to design programs or resources that meet a wide range of learning styles and literacy levels.

Another finding was the lack of resources that informed ECE and service providers as well as parents and children about local food specifically.

- Resources that did reference local food often only highlighted local food with one or two sentences that suggested educators and childcare service providers consider using local food in their programming and meals. Furthermore, most of the resources that did reference local food...
did not provide a clear definition of what local food meant, and more often, local food was often left undefined. Analysis of the resources also revealed an absence of food literacy resources to educate food providers on local food. Whether these resources are not created or readily available to the general public is unclear.

While conducting the environmental scan, several common elements that were difficult to identify were the demand of the resource, and whether the resource was evidence-based and peer reviewed. Unless the resource was submitted by a marketing board or public health unit personnel, data regarding the resource uptake (e.g., is resource being used, who is currently using the resource, and is there a demand for the resource) was difficult to determine with certainty as information on downloads and website analytics were not available.

Given the knowledge gaps in the resources, several different types of resources can be developed for different end users.

- Organizations could develop resources on local food, healthy eating, and other food literacy attributes that target children specifically.
- Another key target is childcare educators and service providers as there are limited resources focused on local foods or local food literacy for this audience. Ideally, these resources should also define what local foods are as different individuals may have differing definitions. Referencing a standard definition for local food, such as the definition from Bill 36: Local Food Act, 2013, would help childcare program providers have a better understanding of what local food is so that they could incorporate more local food and local food literacy in their programs.

Limitations

This study is not a complete listing of all resources dealing with local food literacy or healthy eating in Ontario or in other jurisdictions across Canada. The purpose of the study was to determine the resources currently used by or desired by food providers and educators of young children to learn about including local and healthy foods into meal and snack programs as well as food literacy activities that target childhood educators, cooks, health intermediaries, young children and their parents and caregivers.

- Many resources have been developed by public health units that were not submitted and thus not included in the analysis for this report. Other resources produced by some food and farm organizations, including AgScape teacher resources, were not in this analysis as they were either not identified or submitted in the surveys or were targeted to older children or youth.

Since this study was completed at the end of September 2018 additional resources have been released that could have been included in this study to help inform early childhood educators about local food literacy.

- For example in October 2018 a set of new online modules, “Raise the Bar for Student Nutrition Programs”, were released by ODPH in partnership with York Region and Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) to assist Ontario program coordinators, school staff, administrators, and volunteers in student nutrition programs. The online course is intended to help the user to understand and use the Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines in their program (ODPH, 2018).
Another initiative, Appetite to Play, provides healthy eating and physical activity recommended practices and practice support resources for early years providers to use in a variety of settings including: daycare centres, family based childcare, preschool and parent participation programs.

References Cited


