



Emergency Food Forum 2021

April 14th, 21st, 28th, 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm

Executive Summary

Map?

Contents

About the Organization

The Eco-Just Food Network is a network of households, communities, organizations and food providers dedicated to creating a resilient local, just and ecological healthy food system. We are committed to making good healthy food available for everyone who needs to eat and to reduce food waste in the system.

Centred around food justice, the Eco-Just Food Network is guided by principles of the Human Right to Food, Black and Indigenous Food sovereignty, upholding the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, and building resilience to the Farm and Climate Crisis.

Our main program is the Food Corps program, with which we connect marginalized urban communities with local farmers in a work-and-food exchange program. Farmers require trained labour, and urban communities need food and food security. Our vision is that by facilitating and organizing direct exchanges with food producers and urban communities, we are also creating a new local food system and economic paradigm that prioritizes people, land and communities.

We are also leading the Open Letter campaign, which calls on all levels of Canadian government to enact policies with four main aims:

Introduction

Context:

What's happening in climate

Some good news and some bad news

Legal challenge on climate action in Ontario

Legal challenge on building highway on building on farmland in Ontario

What is the Emergency Food Forum

The Emergency Food Forum started in 2019, with the realization that our land, soil, food, and food supply are being threatened by destructive farming practices, delicate global supply chains, exploitative labour practices and rapidly changing climate. The first EFF was convened to build a community of individuals that wanted to *take action* in creating a healthy, sustainable and resilient food system.

In March of 2020, over 100 people and 73 organizations gathered online to discuss the breakdown of our food supply and the growing food and economic insecurity the COVID-19 pandemic was causing at the second EFF. The main results from that three-day summit can be found on the Eco-Just Food Network EFF web page

(<https://ecojustfoodnetwork.org/emergency-food-forum/>). This year, on April 14, 21 & 28, we continued the conversation, reviewed the lessons of 2020 and built on our successes for a better, more resilient and just food system.

Summary of previous food forums

Grew out of in-person urban--rural session with farmers

- Open letter - Summary and demands

Scope (geographical -- Ontario, GTA, ?)

Map?

At the EFF this year, we focused on identifying issues and generating actionable solutions while looking through lenses of equity and human rights.

The Dish with One Spoon Treaty is ...

Black food sovereignty ...

UN Action track ...

Human Right to Food

The objectives of the Emergency Food Forum are:

Miro Map

Name, date, place, number of attendees

What are the KPIs of the event?

Audience Metrics

How were people notified, when were people notified, who attended/registered?

Promotion by Emails, mail chimp to former registrants and various partner lists

Event brite to inform re links and agendas


163 people registered


63 filled out survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1y2y36XVaBAvrcEIaMIm7r_tAmeGIC0zr8ZIR2VOupaM/edit#responses

Slides from survey:

Who  1.0 Where We Are & Where We Come From.pdf

Where  1.1 Where We Live & Work.pdf

 1.3 Mapping Our Ancestors.pdf

 1.4 Where Our Ancestors Are Originally From.pdf

what orgs

 2.0 Our Affiliations.pdf

33% of registrations attended -61

20% 2nd day

10% 3rd day

- registration presentation

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEbKNAhWxo/18FuGa3OEUAWaztvVICsag/view?utm_content=DAEbKNAhWxo&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink

Phone and email to speakers and key participants

Quotes about the event

Exit survey audience basic info * internal only

-How many responses -and what was the timeline on that?

2 weeks later

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FA5yiLhAZVhywYnvG4PFhsMS8tz3Mxyynf7RUc6lByw/edit>

What did you like about the form?

The opportunity to join other driven people and discuss real world issues

The land acknowledgements, openings and closings were good. I like the summary of projects/ideas shared by participants

How to get green, fresh, healthy and nutritious foods

Being with an excellent group of people talking about important issues around food security, sustainable ag, and climate change

How do you see your role in the food system? 3 responses

I see my role as making sure people have access to safe and nutritious food

Actively participating and advocating to grow and eat healthy foods campaign

Activism, research, supporting business sustainable ag farmers

Programming

Agendas recordings and chat notes:

<https://ecojustfoodnetwork.org/emergency-food-forum/emergency-food-forum-community-centre/>

What were the talks and breakouts (overview of topics)

Miro Board Link

Who were the speakers and what were some highlights?

Indigenous Opening Greetings and Messages

1. Caroline Crawley
2. Josephine Grey Eco-Just Food Network presented on Human Rights and Food

On Day 2:

1. Dey - Seven Grandfather Teachings

1. The first speaker was Anan Lololi, Executive Director of Afri-Can FoodBasket, giving an overview of Black Food Sovereignty

The struggle for Black Food sovereignty in Toronto, the Hotter the Battle the Sweeter the Victory: Afri-Can FoodBasket

info@africanfoodbasket.ca

2. The second speaker was Rhonda Teitel-Payne of Toronto Urban Gardeners (TUG), providing an overview of Urban Agriculture and Food Policy

>Rhonda Teitel-Payne coordinated and managed urban agriculture and other community food programs at The Stop Community Food Centre for 14 years. Rhonda also contributed to city-wide food security initiatives as a member of the Toronto Food Policy Council, Toronto Community Garden Network, World Crops project, Parks and Recreation Community Garden Advisory Committee, Plant a Row Grow a Row and GrowTO. Rhonda received a Vital People

award from the Toronto Community Foundation and was named Inspirational Leader of the Year by the Ontario Association of Social Workers. rhonda@torontourbangrowers.org

3. The third speaker was Josephine Grey, providing an overview of the UN Food Summit and the EJFN Open Letter
4. David Burman from Drawdown Toronto
 - Accelerating Solutions

Speaker bios - affiliations and group description, **picture?**, public *contact info?*

Any feedback from attendees (good things)?

Internal (areas of improvement on programming -)

- *Exit survey*

- *What can be improved?*

Debrief (internal)

Debrief from event - What was good, what was bad?

Did the Zoom set up work?

Other communication platforms

Miro board notes

Timeline

1. Spreadsheet - was pretty empty compared to last time
 - Time allotted specifically for spreadsheet filling?
 - Number of attendees?
 - Should maybe allot time for filling in spreadsheet in the solutions break out rooms
 -
2. Summaries as we go
 - After each breakout, the moderator should write a brief summary of the session

Promotion

What outreach was done, was it effective? Who did we send to, and how?

--through members networks

- newsletters - Climatefast, drawdown, TUG

What social media platforms were used?

-IG FB

When was it done?

(check email)

Things to change for next time

What organizations were involved?

EJFN (have already in pre-amble)

In the spring of 2020, 73 organizations working in the food sector came together for the Ontario Urban Rural Emergency Food Forum Series. The overarching goal of the forum series was to facilitate a strategic, collaborative, and collective approach to adapting our local food system to the twin crises of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of this work, The Eco Just Food Network was born. The Eco Just Food Network (EJFN) aims to connect and enable vulnerable communities, farmers and food providers to achieve food security through food sovereignty. EJFN will train and mobilize youth and community members to form skilled Food Corps that will assist ecological farmers, small scale food processors (e.g., community kitchens) and vulnerable communities to grow, harvest, process, store and access healthy food. Food providers will get the skilled labour they need to grow, harvest, process and distribute healthy food. Food Corps members will develop valuable skills, be duly compensated, have access to fair shares of the food being produced and help distribute healthy food to communities most at risk and low-waged essential workers.

The EJFN is being developed and organized by rural and urban eco-farmers, food providers, youth leaders, and trainers from organizations such as the National Farmers Union Local 305, Local Farm and Food Co-op, Conscious Minds Co-op, Food Share, Afri-Can FoodBasket, and the OASIS Food Hub project of the SJTCC.

OASIS Food Hub

OASIS is a model for an integrated food hub for healthy, affordable, and sustainable food. OASIS is run through a community co-operative. We believe that for a community project to be self-reliant and resilient, it needs to be run by the people it serves. OASIS was designed through a human rights lens for vulnerable communities. By tapping into the assets of the community and the efficiencies of the model, OASIS is able to provide organic nutritious and culturally relevant foods at affordable prices. OASIS' central urban agriculture takes place in climate-controlled growing spaces, creating both year-round access to community-sourced food, as well as on-site capacity for emergency/extreme weather food and water distribution. It means that no matter the fluctuation in weather and growing seasons, OASIS is producing quality food.

Local Farm and Food Co-ops

LFFC is an incorporated non-profit co-operative that has provided organizing and development support for food and farming co-operatives and enterprises in Ontario since 2009. LFFC catalyzed or supported the recent growth of local farms and new collaborations in northern Ontario, including the Northwest Beef Co-op, Black River Co-op, Cafe Meteor co-op development, the Northern Food Distribution Network, Mill Market redevelopment, Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op and Muskoka North Good Food Co-op.

Local food and farm co-ops in Ontario have a significant impact on Ontario's economy, and have been a key tool for community economic development in northern Ontario's local food and agriculture sector, as new farmers enter the area and new markets are established. Ontario's

food and farm co-ops provide stable markets for hundreds of regional producers and processors, and support thousands of jobs directly and indirectly. With two and three times multipliers in the local economy, community development through food and farm co-ops has an impact well beyond the co-ops' own revenues.

Conscious Minds Coop

Led by youth, Conscious Minds Cooperative (CMC) is an intergenerational cooperative stepping into regenerative living, and the possibility of a better world. With a focus on climate-resilience education and adaptation, Conscious Minds creates spaces for its members to activate their unique gifts to learn and better care for themselves, others, and the world we all inhabit. CMC has been a partner in the OASIS food hub project since 2017 contributing participatory learning and design facilitation, and assisting with digital platform and online interaction tech support and development for community engagement and the urban rural emergency food forum. In summer of 2020, CMC youth helped found the Eco Just Food Network and continue to participate in its mission.

SJTCC

The St James Town Community Co-op aims to enable community projects and social enterprises that benefit the residents of St James Town and improve the quality of life in the community. The primary focus is food security and resilience to climate change. The Co-op is currently running a bulk food buying club, an emergency food relief project and developing the OASIS Food Hub with support from the City of Toronto. The SJTC has recently secured a \$200,000 community investment grant being trusted by FoodShare.

NFU Local 305

The NFU local 305 has NFU members in the Toronto-York-Peel regions. They are a group of passionate farmers and eaters who have come together to advocate for local farms and food in rural, urban and suburban settings. Since the Local is located in the Toronto area, they are in close proximity to Queen's Park and many advocacy groups who share our interest in securing a local and sustainable food system in Canada.

Toronto Urban Growers

In 2008, a series of meetings between Toronto city staff, urban growers and organizations working on urban agriculture led to the identification of some common issues in the field. These included: training, land access, enabling policies and opportunities to share knowledge and resources through networking. In order to address these issues, participants agreed to establish a network under the name of Toronto Urban Growers (TUG) in January 2009.

Since then, TUG has promoted knowledge exchanges between urban growers via gatherings, webinars, tours, a website and an online forum. TUG has contributed to many initiatives in Toronto, such as the CEED Gardens in hydro corridors, the Metcalf Solutions paper, GrowTO action plan, the *Guide for Soil Testing in Urban Gardens*, the *Guide to Growing and Selling*

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in Toronto and [Indicators for Urban Agriculture](#). You can find these documents on our [Key Documents page](#).

Afri-Can Foodbasket

Afri-Can FoodBasket, an EJFN member, provides a comprehensive blend of urban agriculture training and technical support for community projects, assisting low-income communities to access food through growing their own. Afri-Can FoodBasket's mission is to provide leadership in urban agriculture, and foster collaboration to advance food justice, health, and social enterprise in the African Canadian Community. Their integrated programs leverage one another as a means to create a holistic solution to address youth unemployment, youth leadership, and cross generational/cross cultural collaboration.

Drawdown

Drawdown Toronto is a federal not-for-profit organization dedicated to using the Drawdown framework and approach to support climate action. We work to demystify climate action and accelerate implementation of climate solutions.

Despite becoming a registered non-profit, we remain close to our roots as local community-based group driven by passionate volunteers. Incorporation is a signal of our commitment to [the drawdown approach](#) and our belief in the power of climate solutions. It frees up our core volunteers to dedicate themselves to what truly matters: driving the low-carbon revolution. We have a Board of Directors to build the infrastructure and processes to ensure long-term continuity and to facilitate our work.

Drawdown Toronto was started in early 2018 as a project of [Unify Toronto](#) and became an independent initiative later that year. Throughout the first year, we organized a series of introductions to Drawdown, sectoral events, and a course, that together put vital information about how we can reverse global warming in participants' hands, connected them with other change makers, and galvanized their action with a new sense of optimism and agency.

others

Impact and Results

Key outputs

- What were the differences between the entrance and exit survey answers?
- what measurements do we have on that?

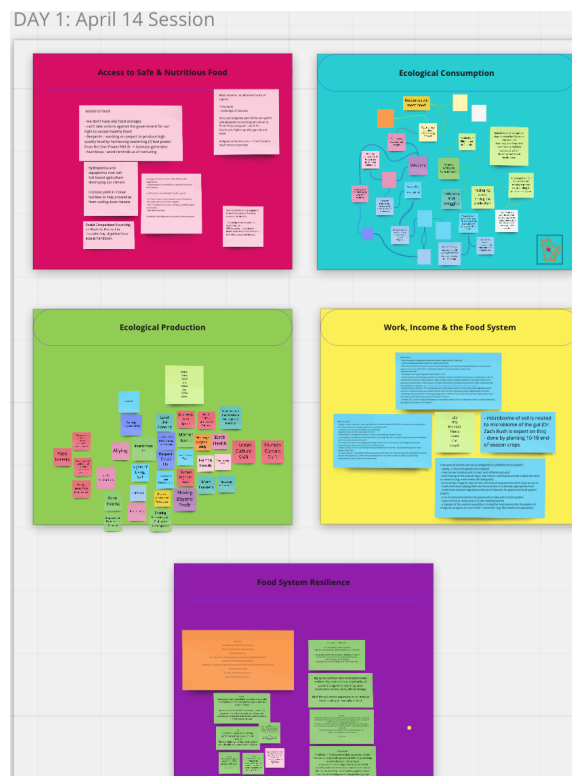
What kind of impact did we have on attendees?

Summaries of the breakout groups

Session One

The first session introduced two lenses through which participants could discuss the food system: The Dish with One Spoon Treaty and the Human Right to Food. The first half of the event was spent familiarizing participants with these lenses, as well as with the ongoing work of the Eco Just Food Network.

The participants were then invited to attend one of five breakout rooms on varying topics. Each group had at least one facilitator and one note taker and all participants were encouraged to view and add to a Miro board. After their discussion, the group's designated note takers and facilitators gave summaries of what their breakout groups had talked about.



Group 1: Access to Safe and Nutritious Food

This group began by discussing the different ways we grow food, whether that be in soil, or using hydroponics or aeroponics, then went on to speak in more detail about the benefits of non-soil based agriculture such as increasing yield and preserving forested land. The group also talked about the limitations of food banks in addressing the food needs of diverse communities. Participants spoke of the experience of using food banks, feeling surveilled, judged, and not

Food banks were only supposed to be a temporary solution to recession in the 80s.

1 in 4 Indigenous people are food insecure
30% increase in food banks
(think about this number w the 1 in 5 who access food banks...)

having access to healthy or culturally relevant food choices. Finally, the group talked about the challenges of living in capitalism and ways to overcome or mitigate those challenges. Some options were discussed like a universal basic income as well as time banks and other alternative economies.

Group 2: Ecological Consumption

First, this group talked about what ecological consumption meant to everyone: consuming and growing foods native to the lands we're on, ensuring living wages and good working conditions for agricultural workers, transparency in the entire chain of production to consumption. They also provided a breakdown of sustainable consumption in the miro notes, as pictured below:

Sustainable consumption characterized by 5 factors:

- Localization
- Reducing eco-footprints
- Community-building
- Collective action
- Building new social institutions

The group then discussed their struggles to consume sustainably during the pandemic, characterized by an increase in online services and use of plastic. If one is trying to consume in an ecologically friendly way, their choices are often limited. One might have to choose between going plastic-free, local, or organic, but rarely get the option to have all three. Time banking was once again proposed as one way of shifting the frameworks of who/what we value in our economic system. Other forms of alternative markets, such as buy-nothing groups, were also mentioned, and the concept of mutual aid came up time after time.

Group 3: Ecological Production

This group started by defining ecological production, as well as talking about the importance of mother earth and grandmother water.



Different forms of economies were also discussed by this group, focusing on sharing economies, but also talking about cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology as decentralized, egalitarian ways of sharing equity. The group then moved to a discussion of land and land use. They talked about seed sharing, genetics of plants and animals being held in a commons, getting more people to farms, getting young people on farm land, providing resources and access to land, as well as the importance of shifting subsidies away from big agriculture and to supporting local, enriching farming practices.

Group 4: Work, Income, and the Food System

First, this group identified two trends in agriculture today:

1. Regenerative agriculture -- low tech, lots of manual labour
2. Digital/automated agriculture -- high tech, data-driven

The group discussed the need to embrace helpful technology while also fostering employment and keeping a sacred connection to the land -- this being particularly true for communities in Northern Canada.

Why this topic?

- trying to create a backyard urban ag initiative; to install rainbarrels (in GTA) to create summer employment for students but get rejected for grants & community centers
- rainbarrel.ca is non-profit selling rainbarrel fittings
- big cities rely on hi-tech ways; ignore lo-tech
- designing DIY sub-irrigation systems; can also start seedlings using LED strips
- can emergency food provision be dealt with in such a way that we can create a productive set of next steps? can the online (zoom) format work?
- the way food is grown is changing very rapidly towards more autonomous technologies, less human involvement (less personal touch), esp in northern areas
- nature of work on farm is becoming more automated and tech-based - taking people away from land - income is not there
- in north, efforts to re-establish dedicated growing community that loves working with and growing food and also has the capability to use the new knowledge that is out there in order to make a living farming
- Improve food access to Northern Communities

Farmers talked about how difficult it can be to get started or to even gain a foot-hold in the food system. There is a simultaneous need in urban communities for healthy food and often an abundance of it for farmers at harvest, so what is necessary is to bring these folks together. Time banking, as well as the Food Corps program being offered by the Eco Just Food Network, were discussed. Some of the concerns around time banking were issues around trust, reciprocity, as well as the difficulty of getting folks to move away from values based on our current economic system.

Group 5: Food System Resilience

This group started off by looking at resilience as a historical system built over time, but also shared different views of what resilience can look and feel like. Two important questions came up:

1. Do we need new systems or do we need to work with what we already have today?
2. How can we do both?

The group agreed that our current agricultural system has made us /less resilient, and that there is a great need for education about all of this, as well as a need to organize together.

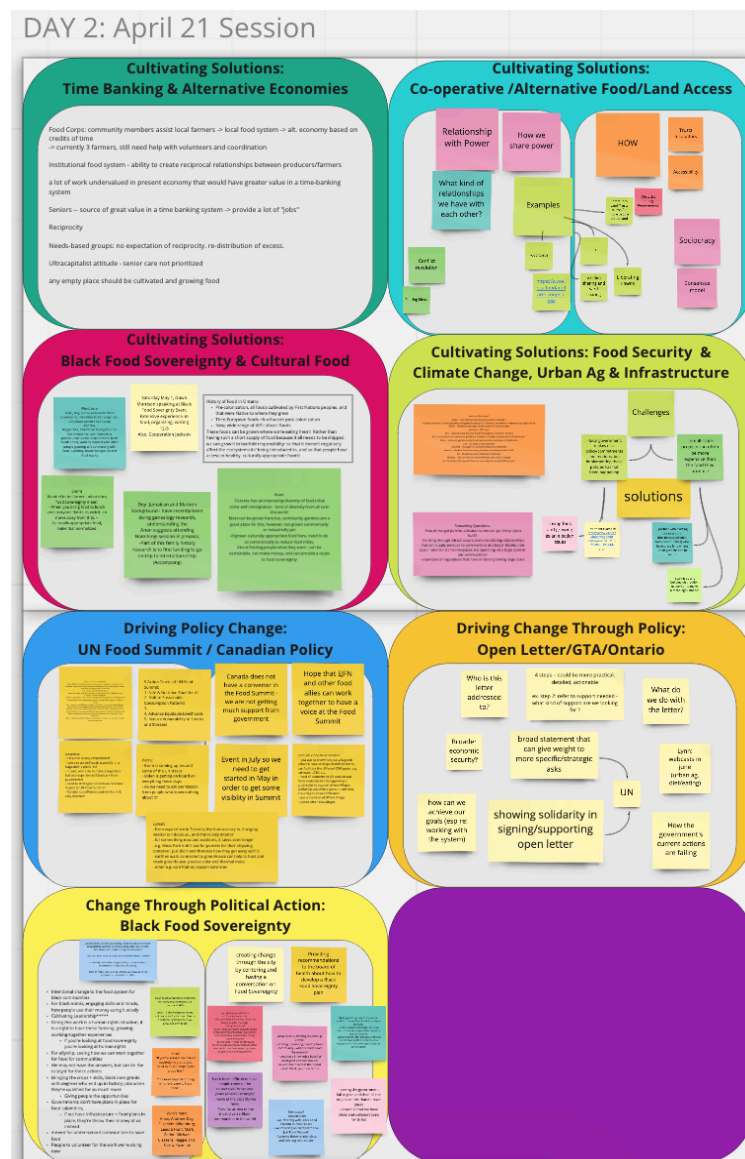
Big agriculture has made food systems less resilient. Big business is causing fragility of systems (clogs in transport, eg), pest destruction, monoculture, climate change

All of this will lead to expensive, non-nutritious foods, leading to inequality in food

The group ended with a discussion about the power of stories and storytelling and the importance of grounding our work in our material conditions and our lived realities. They emphasized that the food system needs to be a system of relationships and not rooted in elitism and corporate power.

Session Two

The second session was meant to get participants not simply talking about the problems we are facing, but “cultivating solutions” to those problems together. The first set of breakout rooms encouraged folks to think of solutions together, while the second set focused on “driving policy change” in the food system.

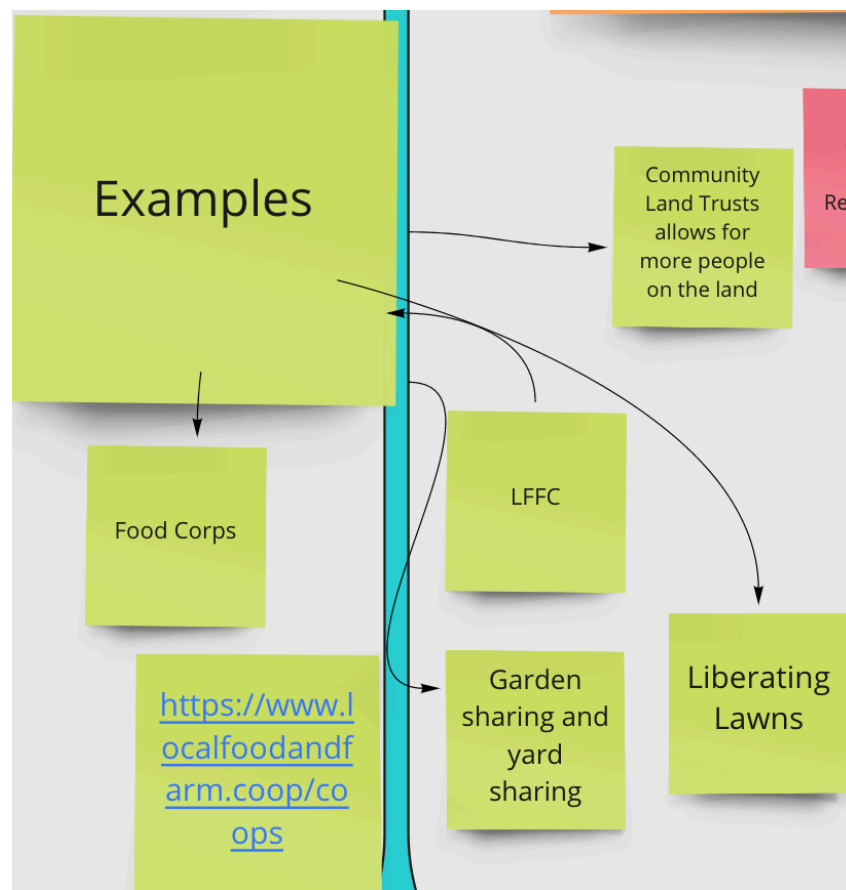


Group 1: Time Banking & Alternative Economies

This group started with an overview of the Eco Just Food Network's Food Corps program, which connects folks from urban communities to rural farmers in need of help. This led to a discussion of the program's use of a time bank, as well as of how that time bank connects to the St. James Town Community Co-op's time bank. The reciprocity of this relationship, as well as reciprocity as one of the foundational concepts of time banking was also discussed. The group also talked about how living inside a capitalist system shapes our attitude towards work such that we need these alternative economic systems to make it easier for us to recognize and reward the labour that keeps our communities and our food system going.

Group 2: Co-operative, Alternative Food, and Land Access

This group discussed concrete ways of getting around lack of access, such as collective ownership models and land trusts. They gave examples of organizations doing this work like Local Food and Farm Co-op, St. James Town Community Co-op, Liberating Lawns, and the Eco Just Food Network. They also enumerated obstacles farmers face to land access such as bureaucratic red tape and zoning requirements.



Group 3: Black Food Sovereignty and Cultural Food

This group began by talking about everyone's ancestral background as well as where each of the participants was coming from in their work. They discussed the history of food on this land and how colonization also brought foreign food which did not naturally grow here before. The great diversity on this land, both in food and in the people living here today was of particular significance to this group. Upcoming actions and events around Black food sovereignty were also mentioned as a way for participants to keep the ball rolling.

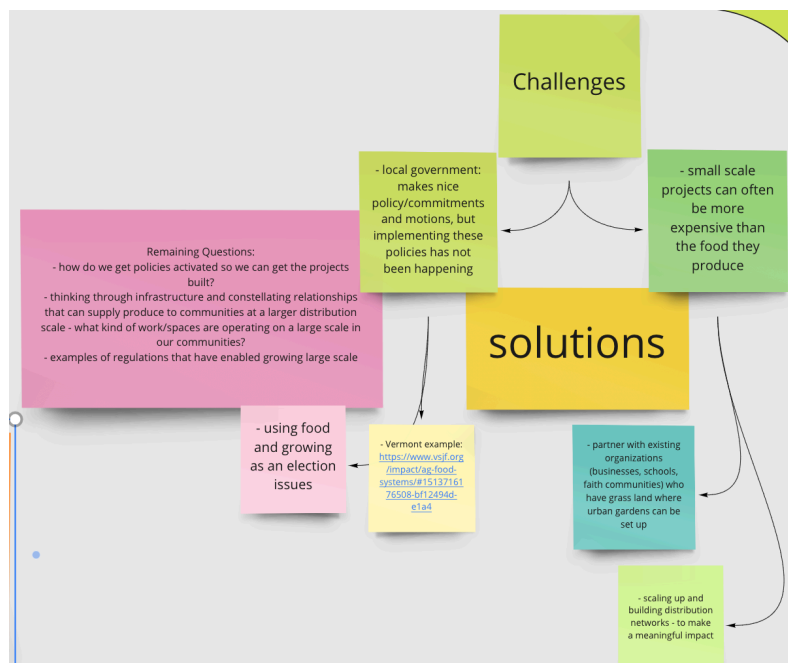
History of Food in Ontario:

- Pre-colonization, all foods cultivated by First Nations peoples, and that were Native to where they grew
- Then European foods + food waste post-colonization
- Now, wide range of diff cultural foods

These foods can be grown where we're eating them! Rather than having such a short supply of food because it all needs to be shipped, we can grow it in twofold responsibility: so that it doesn't negatively affect the ecosystems it's being introduced to, and so that people have access to healthy, culturally-appropriate foods!

Group 4: Climate Change, Urban Agriculture, and Infrastructure

This group talked about problems with zoning, red tape, and bureaucracy when dealing with accessing growing space in the city. They also talked about ongoing actions to mitigate the impacts of climate change on our communities, such as St. James Town Community Co-op's OASIS Food Hub. Another possible solution discussed was to partner with existing institutions who already have access to space, such as schools, businesses, or faith buildings.



Another issue the group outlined is the lack of support from local politicians who too often say all the right things but have not been following through on their promises to our organizations. Ways of applying pressure to politicians such as creating campaigns were also discussed.

Group 5: UN Food Summit and Canadian Policy

The group first went over the 5 UN Action Tracks, then built on that with some of their personal experiences working in food policy.

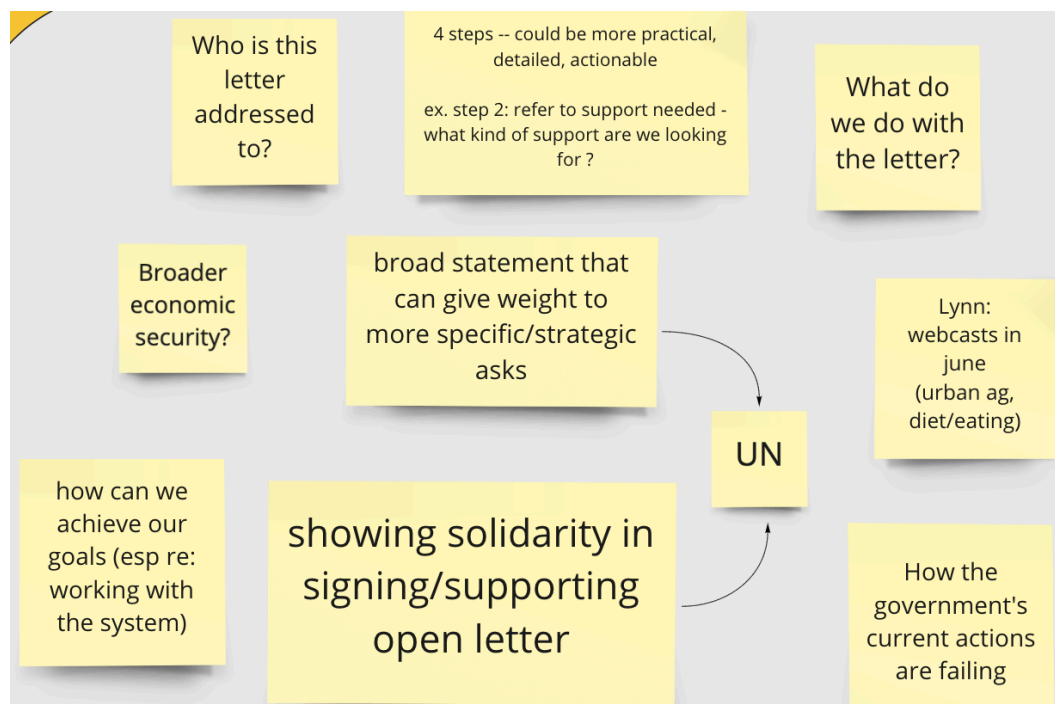
5 Action Tracks of UN Food Summit:

1. Safe & Nutrition Food for All
2. Shift to Sustainable Consumption Patterns
- 3.
4. Advance Equitable Livelihoods
5. Reduce Vulnerability to Shocks and Stresses

Participants mentioned the belief that our local governments in Ontario are actively getting in the way of helpful initiatives, as opposed to other places in the world which can sometimes be more welcoming and supportive to their citizens. The group talked about the human rights abuses going on in Canada and proposed actionable solutions for holding our own dialogues and getting our story out there.

Group 6: Open Letter/GTA/Ontario

This group talked about the open letter which can be found at the end of this report. The letter was written as a result of the previous Emergency Food Forum; consequently, part of the group's discussion centred around how the letter has been used in the past year, how many individuals and organizations have signed on, and how to work on advancing and actioning the



letter's demands. Despite the government's perceived eagerness to address our current climate crisis, the group felt that their local representatives were not doing enough to address the real needs of their constituents.

Group 7: Black Food Sovereignty

This group talked about the importance of engaging Black communities, especially Black youth around Toronto and the GTA in Black food sovereignty initiatives. The group stressed the significance in listening to communities who know what the problems are and often also have great plans for how to fix those problems.



During the pandemic, the government showed a lack of strategic planning and the importance of local, grassroots movements was evident. The group also discussed how to organize Black communities, especially in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

Session Three

The final session was spent organizing what next steps the participants could take to bring action to the previous sessions' discussions. Participants broke up into three breakout groups: one focusing on direct action, one on local/regional policy, and one on international policy.

Direct Action Group: Building a Resilient Local Food System

Session 2 What were the issues identified?

Session 3 What are the solutions proposed?

What are the actions?

- Working groups and breakout groups formed - descriptions
-

Spreadsheet of Solutions

In order to organize and identify gaps and possibilities we created a spreadsheet of food system solutions. The sheet was first separated into eight different goals or intentions that had been drawn out during our break-out groups, as well as continuing conversations from the Emergency Food Forum of 2020 (ex. Indigenous Access to Local Land Spaces, Policy Demands, and Food Awareness and Literacy etc.). Under each

goal we included three columns: role, resource, need, opportunity; person, organization, strategy to offer; and groups or organizations already connected to this work. The first two columns would be filled by someone offering or looking for something, and the third could be filled by another person who sees how this offer/ask fits in somewhere else. This provides an opportunity for networking and identifying gaps and opportunities, one result from this spreadsheet was the creation of our Education Committee.

Education Committee

The Education Working Group provides non-formal ecological and green job education opportunities to youth from ages 15 - 25 who have either completed or left highschool for other reasons. The Education Working Group seeks to create opportunities for youth to try out different roles and topics within ecological- and food security-focused initiatives. A central goal is to provide youth with accessible options outside of traditional and expensive education settings (ex. universities) to learn and try out different career options. This program will provide remote and on-site training and education ranging from ecology, research and development, farm work and the food corps program, various forms of coordination, and emergency preparedness.

Alternative/UN Food Summit Working Group

The Alternative/UN Food Summit Working Group was created in response to the overwhelming representation of wealthy persons and corporate interests at the expense of low-income the UN Food Summit. Specifically, this group seeks to connect with the Alternative Food Summit and determine possible routes of collaboration, in addition to writing as a representative of Canada to the UN Food Summit to highlight the Canadian government's failures in supporting food security.

Looking Forward

Description of Working groups

Snapshot of what people are currently working on

- From registration presentation

What do people see as the future of the food system?

- Registration surveys + notes
-

What are actions?

What is applicable to other areas/regions?

-Urban/rural aspect

-Complete food cycle viewpoints - farmers to consumers

Human Right to Food

Appendix - Full Open Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

This open letter on behalf of the Ontario Urban Rural Emergency Food Forum is addressed to governments and all relevant stakeholders concerned with our local food system.

We are Farmers, Food Justice Organizations, Co-operatives, Workers, Educators, Environmentalists, Human Rights Defenders, and people who need to eat safe healthy food. We are calling for urgent action and immediate investment to rapidly mobilize people and resources towards a just, sustainable, pandemic/climate resilient healthy food system in response to rising food insecurity.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission:

“It is essential that responses to COVID-19 be aligned with Canada’s international human rights treaties, domestic human rights laws and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The laws governing declarations of emergency in Ontario and at the federal level expressly recognize the importance of complying with existing human rights protections, even in emergency circumstances.

The pandemic also offers a generational opportunity to more effectively realize rights protected in the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#). Many groups are particularly vulnerable to negative impacts from COVID-19 precisely because their economic, social and cultural rights, right to equality and Indigenous rights, have not been effectively protected or realized in Ontario and Canada over many decades.”

Human Rights law requires that all Canadians, children and future generations are entitled to healthy food, water and a safe environment. Our governments are obliged to uphold and protect the standards of the human right to food. Canada has made many commitments to respect these rights, most recently the [National Food Policy](#). Moreover, Toronto is signatory to the [Milan Food Agreement](#). It is therefore our collective responsibility to work with our communities and our local and federal governments, to ensure safe access to local healthy food.

We hold the following to be true:

Canada’s resource-intensive and fossil fuel-dependent food system is highly vulnerable to economic, logistical, and climate disruption. The supply of imported foods we rely on during winter is at risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme conditions such as drought, floods, wildfires and pests. Canada is also a global exporter in a time of current and projected global famine and climate chaos.

The pandemic has revealed and exacerbated existing problems within our current food system. Migrant farm workers and slaughterhouse and meat packing employees face unsafe and unjust working conditions that have resulted in COVID-19 outbreaks. Low-paid food system and other essential workers are at a high risk of contracting COVID-19 as they are pushed to work to make ends meet and frequently interact and travel with the public. Some are also working for employers who are not providing proper safety measures.

Low-income and isolated communities are already facing food shortages. It has long been recognized that there are too many food deserts in Toronto and the GTA, where many essential workers and their families also live.

There is no guarantee that today's global supply chains will be able to provide access to healthy nutritious food for all Canadians this winter. Neither can Canada's current at-risk food system guarantee sufficient supply to international aid and trade partners and maintain our own domestic food security, before next year's harvests.

Climate and pandemic chaos is also impacting the home countries, communities, and families of our migrant farm workers and Toronto's diverse racialized communities from the Global South. These countries will be hard pressed to provide healthy food security for their own people and export enough food to feed the millions of Canadians facing hunger this winter. Given that the global food crisis affects us all, just and sustainable local to global solutions are urgently needed.

Food insecurity in Canada already affects 1 in 6 children (PROOF 2019). Healthy, locally produced food is already inaccessible for low income communities, and food prices are on the rise. People of African descent, Indigenous people, People of Colour, recent immigrants, and otherwise marginalized rural and urban communities are disproportionately impacted by our failing food system (Toronto Star).

Food banks, reliant on grocery surpluses and volunteers, are not a reliable or sustainable strategy for addressing hunger during or after a pandemic. They are, at best, a temporary solution to the on-going problems of the unsustainable industrial food complex.

National, provincial, and local organizations have been conducting research and hosting discussions with diverse stakeholders on how to address the challenges of our food system and the COVID-caused food crisis, such as Food Secure Canada, The National Farmers Union, and our Emergency Food Forum (2020). It was concluded that rapidly implementing a just, sustainable and resilient local food ecosystem is necessary to meet the needs and sustain the health of all communities.

Therefore, We, the Emergency Food Forum, comprised of 73 food, farm, and food advocacy organizations in rural and urban Ontario, urgently recommend:

1. Immediate action and investment in re-purposing and improvement of local land, infrastructure, resources, and skilled labour to dramatically increase our local supply of healthy food; using emergency measures as required. This includes prioritizing the food

sovereignty of Indigenous and People of African descent, preventing development on existing farmland, and encouraging the creation of urban farms that can grow food year-round in Toronto, especially in vulnerable communities.

2. Support for local organizations, co-ops, and farms in mobilizing a pandemic-prepared workforce to assist farmers and communities with the harvesting, processing and distribution of as much healthy food as possible. This food will be supplied to farmers, food system and other essential workers, their families, and the most at-risk communities.

3. Ensuring that adequate incomes, safe working and healthy living conditions are guaranteed for all farmers and food system workers. They are performing skilled work essential to preventing hunger, disease, and civil unrest while working towards the human right to healthy, safe, and sustainable food for all.

4. That government civil services collaborate with civil society to allocate the resources and infrastructure required to enable the resilience, sustainability and inclusivity of local secure healthy food systems. A bio-culturally diverse, year-round, regenerative local food economy can sustain the local population through future pandemics, disruptions, and emergencies while transitioning our economy and society to meet climate action targets and prevent ecocide.

To conclude:

All parties involved should strive to conduct this emergency/recovery food system response in accordance with the [Dish With One Spoon Treaty](#)'s mandate to protect and preserve the natural resources and food supply of the Great Lakes region for current and future generations, the UN covenants on the [Rights of the Child](#), [Economic Social and Cultural Rights](#), [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People \(UNDRIP\)](#), and other indivisible articles of human rights treaties, the [UN Decade for People's of African Descent](#) and the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#), and all related domestic policies that Canada has committed to protect, uphold and fulfill, by law and in deed.

Signed:

The Emergency Food Forum

Organizations

Africa Climate Action Initiative

(under the umbrella of Canada Africa Partnership (CAP) Network)

Afri-Can Food Basket

Antler River Interchange Seed Exchange

Climate Change in Mount Dennis

Climate Fast Toronto

Davenport Mutual Aid Network

Draw Down Toronto

Earth to Tables Legacies Project

Eko Nomos Inc.

FoodShare Toronto

Garden Jane

Greenpeace

Kalina Food Trading Company

LIFT Toronto (Low Income Families Together)

Local Farm and Food Co-operative Ontario

Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics

MABELLEarts/MABELLE Pantry

My Peeps Place

National Farmers Union Local 305 (Toronto York Peel)

Oasis Foodhub Project

Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC)

Regenesis

Scarborough Food Security Initiative

St James Town Community Co-operative

The Table Soup Kitchen Foundation- Muskoka South Food Rescue

Toronto Environmental Alliance

Toronto Urban Growers

Windermere United Church

Farms & Food Providers

Black Creek Community Farm, Toronto, ON

Cavaleiro Farm, Schomberg, ON

Cedar Down Farm, Neustadt, ON

Crooked Farmz, East York, ON

East End Neighbourhood Urban Farm

Fish Tree Farm, Bolton, ON

Lucky Bug Farm, Kitchener, ON

Maple Hill Farm

Morninglory Farm Community, Killaloe, ON

Mount Wolfe Farm, Caledon, ON

Riverdale Farm & Forest Inc., Inglewood, ON

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