

# Huron County Sustainable Food System Action Plan – March 2017

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Huron County, like myriad of communities across Canada, North America, and the world, has come to realize that a focus on sustainability, that safeguards a future for the next generations, will take careful assessment and planning. In recent years, Huron County has facilitated the development of a Take Action for Sustainable Huron Community Sustainability Plan, one which incorporates a broad range of social, economic, and environmental aspects. It sets out goals and actions, which are outlined as moving the community forward on a sustainability continuum. The underlying truth to the plan is that change will need to be considered and actions undertaken. Complementing this ideal is the Huron County Healthy Rural Lens, which integrates some of the unique rural characteristics and conditions that must be considered to successfully design programs and policy based in Huron County realities.

Furthermore, the Huron County Food Charter takes several facets of Sustainable Huron, focuses on all the elements of the food system (production/collection, processing, distribution, consumption/access, and waste) and creates a vision for a sustainable local food system. This vision, a holistic view of the economic, environmental and health aspects of food and an acknowledgement of our responsibility to influence and alter conditions for a better future was developed through facilitated stakeholder conversations. Created by the community, the Huron County Food Charter includes well-defined objectives and the incremental goals that need to be considered to achieve them.

The Huron County Food Charter describes:

- A just and sustainable food system that is rooted in healthy communities;
- An economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable food system, that enriches life within the county while protecting our precious natural resources;
- A democratic and participatory food system that engages and empowers citizens to make knowledgeable choices about their food;
- A resilient food system that is our assurance for the future.

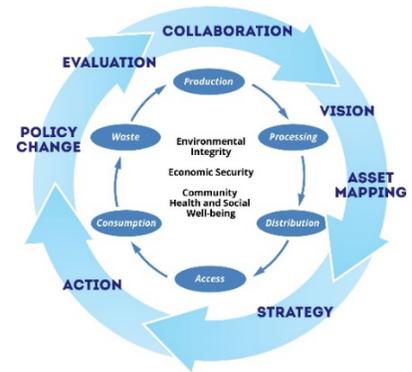
The Huron Food Action Network (HFAN), brings together institutions, farmers, community groups, elected officials, and businesses in an informal network to tackle the issues of access to healthy food, sustainable food production, education and local food processing and distribution. HFAN acts as a facilitator and food system champion seeking to be the medium in which food system development could be incubated and where individuals could network and combine like-minded missions. Initially, several working groups were created in the areas of food policy, food distribution, food literacy and community gardens. Each working group developed a mandate and used allocated resources to organize a project which complemented their focus area. A seed library project, a tour of food distribution sites in neighboring counties and an expansive food charter development process were undertaken.

The Food System Report Card expanded on the Food Charter to create a baseline measurement of the Huron County Food System, one which would be the touch point to quantify change within the system. This report card, published in the spring of 2016 recorded over 15 indicators and suggested additional areas for measurement and recommended future food system reports to monitor trends.



The Huron County Food System Action Plan is the third phase of this extensive project which seeks to drive sustainable local food system development. It takes the vision expressed in the Huron County Food Charter, considers the status of the Huron County Food System and determines the actions needed to bring the vision to reality.

The development of a healthy and sustainable food systems requires change. It requires the understanding of current realities, natural progression, remedial actions, and the envisioned end point. In some cases, long term, negative influences have deteriorated local food systems to a degree that requires immediate and considerable action. Directed by a collaborative vision, action and strategies target the areas that will make the most difference. These actions are directed towards solidifying support, measuring and providing evidence of/for food system change, developing strategies and targeted activity, influencing and formulating supportive policy and finally evaluating current practices and plans.



**Food System Activation Cycle**

[\(Healthy Food for All – 2015\)](#)

## Current Overview of Huron County Food System

The 2015 Huron County Food Report was based on the objectives listed in the HFAN Terms of Reference with one addition that referenced the health of Huron County residents. The objectives include:

1. Improve the policy context to enable and empower decision-making for a healthy local food system;
2. Encourage sustainable production of local food, serving as good stewards of land and water;
3. Expand existing and develop new distributions channels and opportunities for improved accessibility;
4. Improve local food processing and employment capacity of Huron County;
5. Improve local food skills and education;
6. Improve the health of Huron County residents.

Trends in most of the above objective areas show growth. Ecological farming practices are on the rise and are being applied by both organic and conventional farmers. The development of community gardens and seed libraries represent the public interest in food production as well as the preservation of both skills and resources required to maintain the food supply. Availability of local foods has increased through the establishment of new distribution mechanisms including the Bruce Huron Produce Auction, school food procurement program through the Ontario Student Nutrition Program and the increase in farmers’ markets and farmers’ markets sales. Local food skills have increased and many programs exist to teach and demonstrate the production, preparation, and preservation of food.

Negative trends within the food report includes a slight decrease of employment in the food industry, a trend that reflects the Huron County reality of a very tight workforce. Huron County businesses identify the lack of skilled workforce as the major barrier to business expansion and growth. The health of Huron County residents, although not specifically measured is suggested to be declining as overall health trends include increased obesity, diabetes and other food related illness are on the rise across the province. Huron County tends to measure above the provincial average for many of these health-related concerns. Also, the cost of a nutritious food basket (tallied on an annual basis) has risen 17% since 2009, making it more expensive to make the healthy choice, especially for those on a reduced income.

The Huron County Food Report chose to use a quantitative system to measure the various food system indicators. The report acknowledges the lack of available data and the difficulty acquiring that which does exist. The effectiveness of the



report is reliant on finding statistics in the applicable areas. A more qualitative process, one which scores initiatives on a sustainability continuum might be more effective. Such a system would note progress and measure change between assigned periods. The end goal is sustainability, and to achieve this we must become increasingly sustainable on a consistent basis.

### Current Activities

The current food system activities in Appendix A represent a wide array of interests, expertise and motivations. These activities are all food system related and reflect the evolution of the various elements. Collaborations and partnerships have been created; new sector or focus groups have been formed. Huron County stakeholders have participated in joint research and consultations, and with like-minded colleagues have created new mandates and observations. Innovative programs and products have been developed. Many are new, some ongoing, others completed – all indicative of the commitment of Huron County citizens, business owners and community leaders to a sustainable local food system.



### Vision

The Huron County Food Charter, which was led by the food policy working group, is a vision. It is based on the HFAN mission statement, which is to “cultivate a sustainable local food system to nourish all people of Huron County and beyond. The values and principles contained within are aspirational. They describe the conditions that could/should exist to ensure sustainability in the food system. Written by the community, it has become a public document as various individuals, municipalities and agencies have endorsed it.

The Food Charter is written to reflect the reality that Huron County is one of the most agriculturally developed and productive jurisdictions in Canada. It offers principles that can be applied to both the local food supply and that which will be exported beyond County and National borders. Unlike many community developed food charters that focus on local food – it acknowledges that Huron County will always “export” food beyond its borders as the production capacity far exceeds the needs of residents. It suggests the conditions required to diversify and preserve the economy, environment, and social structure and to protect assets/resources for future generations. The Huron County Food Charter is a guide to shape food related policy and projects.

The initial objectives that were highlighted when the Huron Food Action Network was created in late 2013 and included in the HFAN Terms of Reference (above) were used to create the various HFAN working groups among them a food policy working group which led the creation of the Food Charter. A combination of these objectives and the values expressed in the Food Charter as well as the current activities within the food system will be used to generate an action plan. Looking forward to a period of 5 years in the future, the various stated outcomes are moving the Huron County food system up the sustainability continuum to a more sustainable future.

### Action Plan

A food action plan is a community driven strategic plan that assesses how we produce, distribute, consume, and dispose of food. While each community tailors the plan to their specific needs, most share two common elements: they capture the aspirations of the community around food and farming, and they identify concrete things that can be done to improve the policies, programs, and individual actions that shape how food moves from farm to plate.

This action plan is a commitment to stated goals and objectives of the Huron County Food Charter. In the case of the Huron County food system, it creates the pathway to a shared purpose. The Huron County Local Sustainable Food System Action plan is grounded in food system thinking, the value of collaboration and the idea that change and intervention are necessary to ensure success.



Food system thinking examines food production and provision in a holistic way. A system is an entity which maintains its form and function through the interaction of its parts or elements. The character and properties of any system come from the many interrelationships between and amongst the elements. Each food system element including production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste is a part of the whole first with its relationship to its environment or regional context as important as its relationship with the other elements in the system.

To affect food system change, we must first understand the inherent qualities of a system and know the patterns of interactions and underlying structures. Systems, food systems included, share the following characteristics:

- All parts must be present to carry out the system purpose optimally
- Knowing the purpose or design of a system allows us to understand our impact on it
- Changing the structure of a system can increase/decrease its performance
- Change in one direction can be resisted by adding change in the other direction
- Systems, especially living natural systems, continue to evolve, and change.



**Sustainable Food System (HFAN Food Charter)**

Constant measurement, analysis and evaluation is necessary to gain full understanding of the impacts of our actions. Piloting new initiatives and examining actions undertaken elsewhere will help achieve success. A fluidity and flexibility will be necessary to adapt to outside forces which we may have very little control over. A clear commitment to the vision and an understanding of the complexity of the food system will also be essential.

Utilizing the main Food Charter goals to guide the Action Plan, the tables and discussion below include broad strategies towards a sustainable food system. Each strategy will be explored to recommend specific actions, actors, and leverage points.

## Actions

### Goal #1 - A Just and Sustainable Food System that is Rooted in Healthy Communities

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Strategies	Actions	Outcomes
Combat food insecurity by providing emergency food sources and working towards long-term root cause solutions including 'living wage', affordable housing and other income based solutions.	Nutritious Food Basket Costing - Ongoing – Huron County Health Unit (HCHU) monitors the cost of food to assess barrier to food security.	Nutritious Food Basket Costing continues to be monitored and information included in policy and programming.
	Integrate Food Banks with other services ( <a href="#">Community Food Centres Canada model</a> ).	Huron County Food Banks and <a href="#">Huron County Food Bank Distribution Centre</a> – network, share resources and information and expand to incorporate more long-term solutions alongside of emergency food provision.
	Link County Food Banks to improve efficiency, reduce overlap and waste.	
	'Living Wage' campaigns	Huron County public institutions and businesses offer ' <a href="#">Living Wage</a> '.
	Food system solutions for food insecurity	Food system thinking is incorporated into poverty reduction initiatives such as the <a href="#">Poverty to Prosperity in Huron Network</a> .



Increase food literacy and food skills in general population to make it easier to make the healthy choice.	Use HFAN digital assets to support food literacy and a commitment to a sustainable food system	<a href="#">HFAN website</a> includes links to existing databases and relevant websites, including locally developed resources. Huron County residents understand and support various food system initiatives and understand the impact of their decisions on a healthy sustainable food system.
	Support Community Food Advisors (CFA) to offer food education and demonstrations.	HCHU continues to host the <a href="#">CFA</a> project, which includes local food system knowledge/Food Charter in curriculum.
	Enhance food literacy and skills in schools.	Huron County government and citizens support <a href="#">national/provincial campaigns</a> that advocate for inclusion of National Healthy School Program in all Canadian Schools. Huron County Schools include agriculture and food in their curriculum.
	Support and expand community gardens, seed libraries, collective kitchens, and other community based learning opportunities.	HFAN/Huron County Library system grows capacity and expands number of seed libraries. Creative programming, by County agencies, libraries, and community groups, increases food literacy and security in the County.
	Farm/food business to school programs.	<a href="#">Huron County Food and Water Festival</a> (targeting Grade 5 students throughout the County) includes activities to increase food literacy and skills.
	Local food in school procurement initiatives.	<a href="#">Ontario Student Nutrition Program Huron</a> and Perth expands and sustains its local food procurement program.
	Expand knowledge and practice in promoting/preserving nutritional values in fresh and preserved food.	Huron County residents eat a healthy diet based on seasonal availability and season extension.
	HFAN, HCHU and other County departments and organizations participate in learning, sharing, advocating activities with compatible groups, to stay current and relevant in the areas of food security, food literacy and food justice.	Huron County is recognized for the sustainability and resilience of its food system. Huron County collaborates and contributes with/to various initiatives and activities to increase the sustainability of food systems across Canada and the world.
	Celebrate the taste of local food and the diversity of cuisines	Host Local Food and Beverage events.
"Taste of Huron" is revitalized with calendar of events (trails/tours) highlighting Huron County businesses and farms. Agri-tourism and 'Open Farm' days thrive.		
Produce "world" foods for new Canadians.		"Niche" products desired by Canada's ethnic populations are produced and processed in Huron County (produce, meat, further processing).

The first goal, 'A Just and Sustainable Food System that is Rooted in Healthy Communities' includes three main concepts. Two that impact the health of communities as it relates to their diets and the third that refers to equity and justice, including:

- Food Security: the ability to access and afford food to power life.
- Food Literacy: the acquisition of skills and knowledge to make the most of the food which is available.
- Food Justice: the right to food as a basic human right without discrimination.

HFAN member, the Huron County Health Unit (HCHU) has championed food security and healthy diets in the County for many years. HCHU was an early adapter of a food security definition that is broader than the norm. Articulated by Hamm and Bellows in 2003 it states, "Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice".



The concepts of sustainability, self-reliance, and social justice add more to the food access conversation. Meeting the needs of the food insecure is very important but it cannot be without consideration of the broader context of food. An examination of how, where and why food is grown or gathered as well as how it affects the community is necessary. Urging self-reliance suggests that community is the decision maker and needs the ability to act within its best interest for the benefit for all. All of which supports a food systems approach.

HCHU has and should continue to play a role of emphasizing the significance of community health and healthy communities to the well-being and future of Huron County's food system. To be sustainable, the food system must meet the needs of the population. Resilience is built into the system when even in a globally based economy we have the ability, to feed ourselves.

The HCHU's current methodology to support food security is working toward poverty reduction, without necessarily engaging in the other elements of the food system. A changing focus away from the affordability of food to the means of affording food is an important distinction – one which recognizes that other expenditures and expenses detract from our ability to purchase food. A singular focus on the cost/affordability of food also does not account for additional unmet environmental and social impacts of cheap food including below cost of production returns, loss of farms and food businesses, resource degradation and more.

The conversation on food access needs to be tempered with the other conversations of where are food comes from, who is producing it, how it is produced and how that process affects our environment and communities. The food system perspective needs to be part of the conversation going forward especially as we seek long-term solutions to hunger and poverty.

The HCHU also plays a big part in promoting a 'Healthy Communities Framework' approach. The HCHU has facilitated an intentional process by which the community engages in problem solving and planning which seeks to build on current assets and a democratic approach. The 'Healthy Communities Framework' influenced both the [Take Action for Sustainable Huron Plan](#) and the [Huron County Food Charter](#) and can be characterized by the following components:

- Community/citizen engagement;
- Healthy public policy;
- Asset-based community development.
- Multi-sectoral collaboration;
- Political commitment;

Food literacy is the knowledge and skills that a citizen requires to make healthy and sensible choices for a healthy, sustainable diet. Research and anecdotal evidence identifies the lack of skills in food preparation, preservation, and the lack of knowledge in nutritional values, proper storage techniques and more, as barriers to families and individuals achieving healthy diets. Generational transference of these skills is less prevalent today and food curriculum in schools are limited.

Processed and packaged foods or 'fast foods' are generally accessible to everyone and do not require complicated skills to prepare and/or eat. A consistent diet of them however, may be problematic in ways that can impact the food system and the health of an individual. Raw or minimally processed foods tend to be of higher nutrient value and if produced locally have less energy invested in their transport and production. Meals produced from raw or primary components, likely contain few preservatives or other additives that are, generally, added to packaged foods to ensure palatability long after they are prepared. Excess of processed/'fast' foods packaging can be concerning from a waste perspective, as well as the high contents of fat, sugar, and calories in some processed foods.

Churches, food banks, community agencies and service clubs have and continue to host collective kitchens, kids cooking clubs, and community dinners. These initiatives share the same purpose; to teach valuable food skills in social settings to help fill the gaps in knowledge and practice. Added value to food purchased directly from producers (farms and



processors), is the preparation and nutritional information that often accompanies it. Many of these vendors are ‘experts’ in their production areas and are glad to share.

The role of HFAN and the Huron County Health Unit continues to be a facilitator and a promoter of healthy community conversations and healthy food choices. Influencing other County departments and Municipal leaders to always consider a holistic approach and leveraging outside resources and connections will be valuable contributions to a local sustainable food system. HFAN, plays an additional role of linking all conversations within the food system to help achieve County-wide food security, food literacy and food justice.

**Goal #2 - An economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable food system that enriches life within the County while protecting our natural resources.**

<b>Goal #2 - An economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable food system that enriches life within the County while protecting our natural resources.</b>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Increase the diversity of farms and food businesses in scale, scope, and size.	Enable a diversity of farming operations by allowing various farm sizes and protecting small acreages especially from non-farm use.	Farms in the County are of various sizes, scopes and scales and supported by policy and relevant infrastructure.
	Sponsor learning opportunities that encourage adoption of current technologies and support innovation.	A learning series (like <a href="#">Bruce/Grey Farmers’ Week</a> ) focusing on various production/processing aspects of food is an annual event.
	Support diversity in supply by encouraging farm input suppliers, banks, and financiers, etc. to consider various scopes of operations.	Microfinance, venture capital, cooperatives, equipment/labour partnerships and other tools to grow and establish farms and food businesses through shared investment exist.
	Incubate food business and farms.	Public and private initiatives incubate farms. Food business incubators, land trusts and creative land/business transfers are piloted.
	Support Great Lakes Fisheries and gathering of ‘wild foods’.	Fisheries and wild foods are included in any programs which enhance farm and food businesses. New fish and ‘wild’ food businesses start.
Support the adoption of nutritious, local food in area businesses and institutions.	Increase food safety competence/commitment in local food value chain.	HCHU has consultative/facilitative approach based on best practices – flexible to scale and scope of businesses
	Provide nutritional, caloric labeling and other services to enable wholesale trade.	New food products and services are developed and local food and farm business flourish.
Improve financial viability of the food sector.	Increase direct marketing venues by promotion, capacity building and skills development.	Producer/food businesses who direct market retain more of the food value for themselves and for further distribution in the local economy.
		Direct market sales options such as Farmer’s Markets, Community Supported Agriculture, Bruce Huron Produce Auction, farm gate sales, food hub aggregation increase in sales and viability.
	Build a localized food sector. Create shared marketing initiatives and products.	A network of local food producers (sector roundtable or association) forms to influence food system development as well as create shared marketing initiatives and products.
		A Huron County ‘brand’ is created/recreated to reflect regional terroir and authenticity of source-identified product. Consistent and quality market-ready food experiences build a highly-rated Huron County culinary experience.
Strengthen the distribution of local	Support operation/efficacy of Bruce Huron Produce Auction (BHPA)	Collaborative distribution mechanisms reach markets beyond Huron County borders.
		BPHA buyers/sellers increase, and product diversity and sale volumes continue to expand.



products through new and existing networks, food hubs and alternative markets		A complementary delivery business distributes produce beyond buyers in attendance.
		Economic impact of auction sales is tracked beyond auction to end use sale creating measure of BHPA economic impact.
	Establish Huron County Food Hub pilot to build towards development of permanent infrastructure.	An aggregation/distribution project that targets clusters of supply/demand is successful. A proven case for building a food hub that supports aggregation, distribution, and other features is completed.
	Build collaborative distribution initiatives.	Current local and external food distribution routes are scanned to gauge available capacity for co-distribution. Collaborative distribution routes sell Huron County goods throughout the region, country, and world
Create mechanisms to reclaim, reduce and minimize food waste	Compost industrial/commercial food waste.	Municipal compost initiatives incorporate commercial food waste and return nutrients back to food system Food distribution routes pick up organic waste for composting as they make deliveries.
	Introduce 'green' standard for packaging.	Food businesses use 'green' packaging and smaller users collectively purchase standard sizes/elements packaging.
	Introduce various uses for seconds.	'Ugly' vegetables are included in primary sales.
		Processing capacity in region increases and seconds are used to make value-added products. Processing capacity includes canning, freezing, dehydrating, fermenting, and smoking.

The second goal, an economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable food system that enriches life within the County while protecting our natural resources is focused on building the food system as an economic driver while preserving and protecting resources for future generations. It calls for a facilitated approach which will create structures and provide opportunities for businesses to form, expand and diversify.

The agriculture and food, priority area in Take Action for Sustainable Huron Plan (Sustainable Huron) echoes the second Food Charter goal, it states “Huron County will have a strong and diversified agricultural industry, providing food to the local community and beyond using environmental best practices”. Not surprising, both community influenced visions incorporate the same values including these from Sustainable Huron:

- Strengthen Huron County's agriculture industry
- Support a diversified agriculture sector
- Continue to build support and momentum for local food in Huron County communities and neighbouring regions
- Promote and market the use of environmental best practices in the agricultural industry

Huron County is rich in arable farm land and currently has adequate moisture and enough frost-free days to grow a wide-range of crops and produce. Although, the most prevalent crops grown are commodity crops including wheat, corn and soybeans, other crops including horticulture, fruits, various livestock and specialty crops are also grown. Huron County has a number of world-class crop handling facilities that export grain and oilseeds throughout the world. A fledgling wine industry has meant the establishment of a number of vineyards in the County.

Huron County has a solid base of local food production businesses including farms, cottage industries and small to mid-scale food manufacturing. Huron County has 8 farmers’ markets, where farm and food vendors sell directly to the public and occasional make wholesale connections. There were also up to 50 local food venues represented on the 2013-2015 version of the Huron Perth Buy Local Buy Fresh Map. The Huron Bruce Produce Auction, just across the border in Bruce County is a good example of a community food hub as it aggregates the production primarily of the Mennonite Community in Lucknow area and sells it in fairly large case lots at a wholesale produce auction during the season: May to November. Many chefs, restaurateurs and retailers are also committed to utilizing local products in their product



offerings. Huron County is also fortunate to have several meat processors which specialize in processing small specialized lots for local producers. Finally, the region now boasts a number of micro breweries and cideries.

In a natural ecosystem, bio diversity or the complexity of life is a measure of resilience. Resilience is the ability to adapt and survive to crisis or change, some of which is anticipated and some not. Diversity means that should one element fail or disappear, something will, with some adaption, fill the function and keep the system going. The diversification suggested in this report is directed towards all types of crops, type of markets, type of end products and production systems. Building these elements and niches will be the most sustainable if they consider economic, environmental, and social balance.

Huron County has the building blocks for a strong local food sector including expertise, land and a committed customer base which swells during the peak summer season. Direct marketing and filling niche demands are opportunities for new entrants to farming and food businesses. Smaller scale operations allow individuals to build skills and investments over time, and are a necessary entry-level mechanism to a sector in which full-time investments are prohibitive. The potential for growth exists and will be expedited by facilitation and collaboration to build supportive infrastructure and mechanisms.

The Huron County Food Hub Feasibility study conducted in 2015-2016 built momentum for aggregation, distribution and marketing of local products as way to grow capacity across the food system. It included a best practices review, asset mapping scan, value proposition and market analysis and made recommendations for both a food hub pilot and outlined the characteristics a food hub should include. A related food and beverage assessment project (2016) identified distribution as a barrier to full use of local products in the participating businesses.

To be successful a food hub requires considerable planning and commitment. It also requires a critical mass to enable the functions to be cost effective and for food volumes to be large enough to satisfy a variety of clients. Growing production capacity alongside of a sub-hub pilot project will help prove the viability and practicality of a full-scale food hub. Developing mechanisms for farmers and food producers to collaborate on various aspects of aggregation and distribution will be beneficial in the same way that collective marketplaces like farmers' markets, allow businesses to share overhead and management to reach a similar customer. Value-adding products by freezing, dehydrating, canning, smoking and similar processes can also be done collectively, benefiting multiple businesses and sharing costs.

For beginning farmers and food business owners, micro-loan or grant programs would be excellent ways to achieve increased production capacity. Sometimes small to medium investments can grow the scale or scope of a business to increase viability and sales. Additional capital can be limited in start-up situations.

Northern Ontario communities with the assistance of various levels of government have begun a recruitment process to bring additional farmers to their region as well as encouraging the expansion of existing operations. One of the tools used to build the northern agricultural sector is a micro-loan program coordinated by a collaborative of local food action groups. Called the Sustainable New Agri-Food Products & Productivity Program ([SNAPP Program](#)), it has just completed a second intake of applications for 75% cost share funding of up to \$5000 for eligible projects or \$15,000 for collaborations. The eligible projects that are meant to increase income generation can include the following:

1. **Season Extension** – Projects that will enable producers to extend their production season, or to extend the seasonal availability of their perishable products through storage. Examples of potentially eligible projects include the purchase or construction of high-tunnel or other greenhouses, or the construction of cold storage facilities.
2. **New Products** – Projects that enable agriculture or food producers to create primary or processed products that are new to the business. Examples of potentially eligible projects include the creation of a new ready-to-eat processed product, or the ability to produce a new farm product. Project equipment may include food or fibre processing equipment or food production equipment.



3. **Productivity Enhancement** – Projects that utilize innovative technologies or processes to increase efficiencies in their operations. Project equipment may include production equipment (monitoring, variable rate technology), animal tracking (tag reading technology) meat processing equipment, food packaging equipment or food labelling equipment.

The program is relatively new and results are not yet measurable, but anecdotal reports indicate that these relatively small investments have considerable impacts on small business bottom lines and regional production capacity.

Huron County’s main commodity crops also present possibilities for secondary industry. For the most part grains and oilseeds are shipped across the country around the world in their original state. Very little value-adding or secondary processing exists in the County. Not only does the County lose the economic impact of the further processing, organic waste which would be otherwise re-incorporated in our soils also leave the County. Transportation costs would also be adjusted if a less bulky product was shipped. Supporting value-adding at all levels of production will help improve Huron County’s sustainability going forward

Supporting the growth of new and existing farm and food business will increase their viability and the economic outlook for Huron County. With targeted funding and facilitation, new enabling infrastructure would build the production capacity even more. Infrastructure such as distribution routes, processing capacity, production co-operatives, sector associations, and aggregation schemes are advised. Key players will be Huron County’s Economic Development department, producer and business organizations, consumers and Municipal leaders as well as the Huron Food Action Network to act as a linking agent between initiatives and organizations.

**Goal #3 - A democratic and participatory food system that engages and empowers citizens to make knowledgeable choices about their food.**

<b>Goal #3 - A democratic and participatory food system that engages and empowers citizens to make knowledgeable choices about their food.</b>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Municipalities, citizens, and food system stakeholders are involved in planning and implementing food system change to achieve Food Charter Vision	Continue to offer Food System Vision (Charter) and other tools to inform citizens, businesses, agencies, and governments of the importance of a healthy sustainable food system	HFAN website highlights resources that reference the local food system, events, and information to engage citizens to be active in the food system. Huron County citizens, agencies and governments continue to sign-on to the Food Charter for the benefit of moving the vision forward.
	Emphasize Healthy Communities Framework as model of community development.	<a href="#">Healthy Communities</a> principles and community consultations are included in various County food and agricultural planning initiatives going forward.
Conduct a food policy review	Conduct Food Policy review – in County and respective municipalities - review policies affecting the food system to determine favourable/unfavourable regulation.	Regular County and Municipal policy reviews include food policy reviews. Identified negative policies are mitigated by responsive policies and programs.
Huron Food Action Network revived to serve as food system champion	Redefine role of HAN to be a vehicle for action as well as a facilitator and link between food system initiatives	HFAN is reorganized and acts as a backbone organization to food system development within the County. HFAN acts as a connector, facilitator, and vehicle for food system development.
Huron County brings concerns and solutions to provincial and national policy context	Regional views in regulatory and policy changes impacting agriculture/food/fisheries are articulated and shared	Municipal Leaders take forward messages about healthy local food systems to affect provincial and federal policy. Healthy food systems are included in the Huron County Healthy Rural Lens.
Food/farm interests are consulted on relevant policies	Municipal and County mechanisms for citizen and stakeholder consultation are	All 3 General Farm Organizations are consulted (OFA, NFU, CFFO) as well as other relevant associations (Farmers’ markets, industry/commodity groups, etc.) as policy and plans are developed.



	developed and utilized to create democratic policies and solutions	
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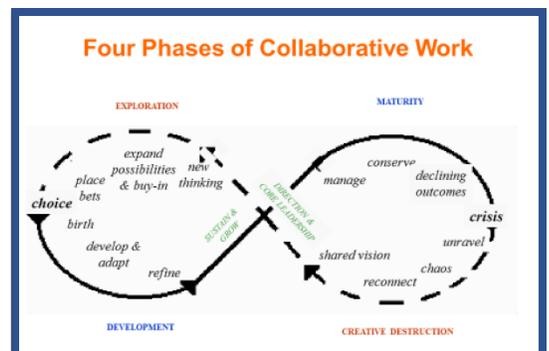
A democratic food system is one which recognizes that stakeholders have much to offer and deserve accountability. This Huron County Action Plan reflects the community vision as described in the Huron County Food Charter. The Food Charter was structured on the definition of sustainability as expressed in the Sustainable Huron Plan, also a community written vision. Both consultations were well attended and citizens took the opportunity to offer feedback and expertise, to heart. Furthermore, many respondents view the values expressed within the documents as similar to their own and realize the impact of today’s decisions on the future of their families, community and country.

A focus on a local food system for action and improvement reflects a citizen’s jurisdictional power which is much stronger on a local level. Attempting to change policy or outcomes on a provincial, federal, or international level is much more difficult than locally where you have more access to and knowledge of decision makers. Voting in the marketplace with your consumer dollar also has much more impact and spending money in local business on local product multiplies the effect of your spending up to four times over, in the local economy.

Huron Food Action Network was established to be a citizens’ action group with the ability to advocate and act for a healthy sustainable food system. From its inception HFAN has built a profile of action, facilitating food system development through its working groups. It has been relatively successful in its four years of existence developing terms of reference, working groups and products including the following:

- Huron Food Action Network Website, Facebook page and logo;
- Huron County Food Charter and Report Card;
- Huron County Food Hub Feasibility Plan;
- Distribution working group and distribution site tour;
- Community gardens working group and special speaker event;
- Food education working group and seed library;
- Food policy action group;
- Huron County Farmers’ Markets collective marketing postcard;
- HFAN newsletters, presentations, and member meetings;
- Contributions to other related projects: Healthy Food for All, Huron County’s Food and Beverage Strategy and more.

As with many organizations and initiatives, the Huron Food Action Network has reached a natural point of reassessment and re-evaluation. Carried by initial interest and enthusiasm, HFAN built profile and productivity and became an effective champion for food system development as evidenced by its various achievements. Much of that momentum has diminished and many stakeholders are holding back to see what next steps are, if any. An ineffective project coordinator, one who seemed unable to mobilize HFAN members, board and working groups accelerated the Network to a crisis of identity. Interest, however, has not waned as many food system stakeholders seek a facilitative, collaborative entity to move the food system forward. Activity and initiatives in the food system have continued but are disadvantaged by a lack of linkages and networking. As with many communities, resources are limited and duplication and



**TAMARACK:** Collaborative efforts have eco-cycles:

- Development
- Growth and conservation (performance)
- Creative destruction/release
- Exploration (renewal)



limited opportunities to link initiatives are disadvantaging progress and a unified approach.

HFAN may have an opportunity to act as a backbone organization. A backbone is a separate organisation dedicated to coordinating the various dimensions and collaborators involved in any initiative, in this case food system development. Supporting backbone infrastructure is essential to ensuring the collective impact effort maintains momentum and facilitates impact. The six functions of a backbone include:

- Guide vision and strategy
- Support aligned activities
- Establish shared measurement practices
- Build public will
- Advance policy
- Mobilize funding

Interaction with food system actors to explain the value of collective impact and the many ways it is currently being implemented as well advocating for an intentional collaborative process may be the first step. Current levels of activity tend towards creative chaos without a higher-level vision and oversight. Efficient and effective activity is critical if we are to build Huron County’s food system to sustainability.

Goal #4 - A resilient food system that is our assurance for the future

Goal #4 - A resilient food system that is our assurance for the future		
Strategy	Action	Outcome
Invest in a new generation of food producers	Conduct a review of new farmers/food businesses and identify barriers, trends, and existing programs.	A new generation of Huron County farmers and food business entrepreneurs are successful and operate a wide range of operations and produce diverse products.
	Design Programming to mitigate barriers and encourage new farmers and food businesses.	
	Engage beginning farmers in food system development	Beginning farmers/food processors lead collaborative development of a sustainable food system
	Introduce training and financing to help build production capacity	Micro Loans/venture capital encourage investment in increased production capacity Collective learning and problem solving are part of sector specific study groups
Facilitate the adoption of environmentally sustainable production practices	Facilitate knowledge building and best practices	<a href="#">Soil and Crop Association</a> ., <a href="#">Ecological Farmers’ Association of Ontario</a> , etc. have local chapters which lead the development of sustainable production practices.
		Farm and food processing reduces/conserves energy use and minimizes release of green house gases.
Protect agricultural lands and sustainable fisheries	Support existing initiatives and monitor for required actions	Agriculture is identified as a preferred use in areas of existing production – limiting environmental reclamation and other non-farm uses to marginal lands and areas which will not interfere with common farm practices.
		Any easements or setbacks are considered ‘in the public trust’ and compensation is paid as in <a href="#">Alternative Land Use Services</a> (ALUS)
Prepare to adapt to climate change.	Support existing initiatives and monitor for required actions	Actions related to climate change mitigation are adopted by area farms and businesses.
Work towards Sustainability.	Balance economic, environmental and social perspectives for the best future for all.	The Huron County food system becomes more sustainable over time.
		The Sustainable Food System Report Card evolves to a more qualitative measure based on a sustainability continuum and is released on a regular basis.



The fourth goal summarizes what we are trying to achieve: a resilient food system that is our assurance for the future. It identifies the elements that are currently seen as critical to the food system's survival. These include the challenges or threats below:

- Farm/food business succession crisis: who will grow/process our food in the future and how we be certain that they can access the resources needed to do so? These resources include land, technology, capital and more.
- Farm/food practices: what practices do we need to consider for change or adaption – both positive and negative?
- Threats to resources: required for farming and fisheries – air, water quality, soil fertility, energy degradation, competitive uses and more.
- Threat of Climate Change: unknown levels of change and their resulting effects.

The Huron County food system is rich in potential and if well managed and designed for sustainability, will support Huron County residents and a large population beyond our borders into the future. Nothing, however, should be assumed and constant analysis, evaluation and goal setting will be required to make sure that the food system continues to move down the sustainability continuum.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The Huron County Food System Action Plan (Plan) is a projection based on current and planned activity in the Huron County food system. It is based on reality, and based on both a historic as well as a visionary path that has been developed by the people of Huron County. Success will be measured by economic, environmental, and social indicators. It will also be measured by the degree of collaboration and collective impact experienced by various actors within the food system.

The Action Plan is a critical piece in the future of the Huron Food Action Network. It calls for a renewal and a reassessment of the Network's role and mandate. It calls for a reengagement of members and a broadening of both the membership and the mandate to include all elements and actors of the food system. It calls for continuous measurement and a facilitative and collaborative approach that links all elements and actions within the food system.

The Plan outlines the steps to an economically diverse farm and food sector operating within environmental and social best practices. It offers the tools and the basic components required to achieve an equitable and educated population who enjoy healthy and nutritious diets which celebrate heritage and tradition. The Plan also foresees engaged and committed citizens determining what the food system should be, through choice and democratic process. The plan identifies the critical threats to sustainability and resilience and offers recommendations for mitigation and adaption.

Unlike the initial intention of developing the Action Plan as a participatory document throughout the project, the Plan was written at the conclusion of the project. Writing the Plan as an observation/assessment of this moment in time without a thorough consultation of the community is counterintuitive to the democratic process advocated within it. The approach was necessary, however, because of a partial failure in project coordination that did not involve the community and HFAN membership in the project deliverables.

The initial step to the activation of the Plan, is to bring it to the community for affirmation, acceptance, and additions. The list of current food system activities (appendix A) will also be of interest and could be a launching point to increased co-operation. The HFAN website and brand are highly valuable resources and should be updated as soon as possible to begin the communication necessary to renew the network and share the assets. Finally, leadership who are currently waiting for signs of life and vitality should be reengaged to be part of a redesign process.

A sustainable future for Huron County and beyond is possible but will require action, commitment, and facilitation. HFAN is a logical choice to lead the way.

