

# Windsor-Essex Food Strategy

## Introduction

The development of the Windsor-Essex Food Strategy is another step in the creation of a just and sustainable food system for our region. This Food Strategy builds on decades' worth of effort in food-related work in Windsor and Essex County. This work has provided a strong foundation on which to build and yielded important lessons about what makes for progress and what can stand in the way. Taking a coordinated approach to all that the region can do in relation to food, we can transform the local food system and provide significant opportunities to elevate the health, economy, and the food environment for all.

**For more in depth background information on the history of food system work in Windsor-Essex, as well as the data that drives this strategy, please review the [Windsor-Essex Community Food Assessment](#).**

### *What can the Food Strategy do for Windsor-Essex?*

- It will provide a roadmap for food system action
- It will integrate food system issues within a single framework
- It will help align food system approaches within broad sustainability goals
- It will identify gaps and prioritize actions
- It will allow food system work to operate at site-specific, neighbourhood, municipal and regional scales

## Food Strategy Approach

Food systems are complex. They include all activities involved in the production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste management of food. Often, issues of equity, sustainability, and security are overlooked as the current food system approach frames food as a commodity, and not a human right. In addition, political context has an impact on the direction of food system work through funding priorities, policy, legislation, and advocacy.

In recognition that food system approaches are inequitable, the following frameworks will be prioritized for all Food Strategy work.

### Health Equity

Health equity is created when individuals have the fair opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Achieving health equity requires reducing unnecessary and avoidable differences that are unfair and unjust. Many causes of health inequities relate to social and environmental factors including income, social status, race, gender, education, and physical environment.

Dismantling racial, economic, and other structural inequities in the food system is critical to ensuring that everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

### Food Justice

Food justice ensures the right of all people to have access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food by addressing underlying structural inequities within the food system which create insecurity and injustice. These structural inequities include, but are not limited to ownership and control of land, credit, knowledge, technology, and other resources; the constituent labor of food production; what kind of food traditions are valued; how colonialism has affected the food system's development, etc.

### Food Sovereignty

Championed by La Via Campesina, an International Peasant's Movement, and refined through broad consensus, food sovereignty has been defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." The discourse of food sovereignty shifts the focus on food from a commodity to a public good. It is distinct from the notion of food security for its emphasis on food citizenship, which underscores the need for citizens to have a say in how their food is produced and where it comes from. The core of food sovereignty is reclaiming public decision-making power in the food system (Food Secure Canada, 2011).

## How To Use This Document

The following goals, recommendations and actions were developed by the residents of Windsor and Essex County. Through the [Windsor-Essex Community Food Assessment \(CFA\)](#)'s community engagement process, a total of 79 food system recommendations were determined. Members of the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council took that information and were able to group common themes and determine 17 recommendations with 30 action items for the Food Strategy.

The Food Strategy is a tool to guide the direction of food system work across Windsor and Essex County. It will be reviewed, evaluated, and updated in regular intervals.

However, this work is not to be done exclusively by the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council. While the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council will use the Food Strategy to drive their work, changes in the food system require thoughtful and intentional work by all community members, organizations, institutions, business, and levels of government. The idea is that each sector will identify the levers they can pull to ignite change within their capacity.

How projects are executed are up to the organization. These actions can be initiated in a certain neighbourhood, within an organization, or at the municipal and regional levels. The Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council asks that we all work towards the same goals, together as a community.

Any questions, comments or for more information on how to get involved, please contact Karen Bellemore at [kbellemore@wechu.org](mailto:kbellemore@wechu.org)

## Food Strategy Principles

The Food Strategy's principles are derived from the Good Food Charter of Windsor-Essex, and envision a healthy, sustainable, and just food system. The guiding principles are:

**Health and Wellbeing:** All who live, play, learn and work in WEC have the right to the best health and well-being that a strong food system provides. This includes:

- Access to nutritious food for all
- Access to quality food skills and education initiatives
- Availability of nourishing food choices in schools, workplaces, and public spaces
- Public policies that protect the health and well-being of the community

**Celebration of Food:** Food brings us together to celebrate the history, culture, and diversity of our community. This includes:

- Sharing of food as a community experience
- Linking rural and urban communities
- First Nation and Metis communities in the traditional belief that all land is sacred
- Food celebrations, festivals and activities that highlight our diverse cultures

**Environmental Sustainability:** Environmental practices and policies conserve our natural resources and provide a healthy food system now and for future generations. This includes:

- Protecting the environment with clean air, land, and water
- Reducing food waste and food packaging
- Composting programs that turn food waste into a resource
- Community gardens and home gardening to connect people to their natural environments and food sources
- Best practices of traditional and new responsible farming approaches that protect the environment

**Social Justice:** Everyone has the right to access sufficient, affordable, healthy, safe, and culturally appropriate food with dignity. This includes:

- Opportunities for people to take charge of where, when, and how they get food
- Fair wages that allow workers to provide for themselves and their families
- Safe and respectful work environments for all in farming and food businesses
- Food that is ethically raised, produced, distributed, and sold
- Protection of farmland for current and future generations
- Protection and growth of family farming

**Sustainable Economic Development** - Farming and food related businesses contribute to economic growth, employment opportunities and a sustainable local food system. This includes:

- Growing, processing, distributing and consuming local food
- Availability of local food products year round
- New partnerships that bring together our local food system with government, health, tourism, education, and hospitality sectors
- Growing foods that historically grew in our area
- Growing foods that meet the needs of our culturally diverse community

## Food Strategy Goals:

The following four goals are aspirations for our community. They describe what success will look like when they are achieved. They help to set the direction of the local food strategy, with each recommendation tying back to at least one goal.

### **Goal 1:** **Increase access to local, nourishing, traditional, and culturally diverse foods for all residents, by supporting food friendly neighbourhoods.**

This goal is achieved when:

- Infrastructure is in place (new, retrofitted, repurposed, or expanded) to include food actions (learning, growing, cooking) to meet the unique needs of residents.
- All neighborhoods benefit from policies that help citizens access nourishing food.
- All schools, workplaces, childcare centers, institutions, and municipal-run facilities have nourishing food and beverage choices.
- Local food is easily accessible, within reasonable distance, through diverse options, such as grocery stores, healthy corner stores, farmers' markets, mobile farmers' markets, and community gardens.
- Policies and programs are in place to encourage and support the development of food retail and alternative food resources in underserved areas.

### **Goal 2:** **Empower all residents to take action in community, and personal, food decisions.**


This goal is achieved when:

- Residents are engaged and participate in food system related community development, municipal decision making, and identifying and supporting food policies and programs.
- Residents can take action to nourish their bodies in a way that is best for them. Cooking food and culinary skills are valued.
- Residents are knowledgeable of the wide variety of food skills needed to nourish their bodies and support a healthy food system.
- Local food systems information is easily accessible so that residents are empowered to learn about, share, and participate in food initiatives.

**Goal 3:**  **Make food a centerpiece of Windsor-Essex's Economy.**

This goal is achieved when:












- A food system lens is applied to all City and County initiatives.
- Farmers, food processors, distributors, and food entrepreneurs have sustainable livelihoods.
- The local food system has the infrastructure required to support the food and farming industry to meet the demand for local food.
- Sustainable practices integrating climate change mitigation/adaptation strategies are in place to minimize the environmental impacts of food production, processing, distribution, and waste.
- The local food system creates and retains jobs in the food sector, with opportunities for training and upward mobility available to residents of all backgrounds.

**Goal 4:**  **Establish a healthy, sustainable, and just food system with partners and at all levels of government.**

This goal is achieved when:

- Partnerships increase capacity for collective action within the food system.
- Supportive policies, programs, and stable funding streams exist to ensure community food security.
- All citizens have the physical and economic means to access food through a healthy, sustainable, and just food system.
- The health and well-being of all citizens is considered a fundamental component of all food system work, creating a just food system.
- Increased investments in the economic stability of residents through jobs, healthcare, and public assistance, reduces hunger.

## Food Strategy Recommendations

Food System Recommendations	Alignment with Goals			
<b>System-Wide</b> Advocate for an income-based approach to household food insecurity				
<b>System-Wide</b> Strengthen communication and collaboration between all food system sectors				
<b>System-Wide</b> Improve coordination among funders, stakeholders, and all levels of government to ensure reliable and sustainable financial support for community food initiatives				
<b>System-Wide</b> Establish a process to ensure that food system impacts are considered during the consultation, planning and implementation of all community initiatives.				
<b>Food Production</b> Create and support alternative ways for community members to grow food in urban centers.				
<b>Food Production</b> Strengthen access to and opportunities for food system-related employment training				
<b>Food Production</b> Increase the number of opportunities for learning and skill development in local food production				
<b>Food Production</b> Support and recognize the international agricultural workers community				
<b>Processing and Distribution</b> Examine the feasibility of establishing a regional food distribution system for schools and other institutions.				
<b>Processing and Distribution</b> Explore local group purchasing program options (i.e., local childcare centers, school nutrition programs, other non-profits)				
<b>Processing and Distribution</b> Foster the food innovation and entrepreneurial spirit in Windsor and Essex County				
<b>Access and Consumption</b> Develop infrastructure and funding to support community food skills development (e.g., community kitchens)				
<b>Access and Consumption</b> Promote physical access to local foods in all neighbourhoods.				
<b>Access and Consumption</b> Explore projects that connect consumers and local food producers				
<b>Access and Consumption</b> Create a blueprint for developing a positive food environment in publicly owned facilities				
<b>Waste Management</b> Raise awareness around reducing food waste through targeted educational campaigns.				
<b>Waste Management</b> Conduct an environmental scan of industrial food waste and explore best practices on how to redirect it away from landfills				

## System Wide Recommendations and Action Area's

Recommendation	Suggested Actions
<p>Advocate for an income-based approach household food insecurity.</p>	<p>Work together to advocate at all levels of government for adequate incomes.</p>
	<p>Facilitate movement along the food security and economic spectrum with a focus on food skills, job creation, and fair wages.</p>
<p>Strengthen communication and collaboration between all food system sectors.</p>	<p>Have representatives from all food system sectors actively participate with the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council</p>
<p>Improve coordination among funders, stakeholders, and all levels of government to ensure reliable and sustainable financial support for community food initiatives.</p>	<p>Establish a standardized funding framework for all community food initiatives, which is transparent and ensures funded projects align with food strategy goals.</p>
	<p>Establish standardized data reporting and sharing mechanisms to ensure all food system partners are aware of program outcomes.</p>
<p>Establish a process to ensure that food system impacts are considered during the consultation, planning and implementation of all community initiatives.</p>	<p>Create a comprehensive food system assessment tool to determine the impacts of policies and community endeavors on the local food system.</p>

## Production Recommendations and Action Area's

Recommendation	Suggested Actions
<p>Create and support alternative ways for community members to grow food in urban centers.</p>	<p>Advocate for the protection of productive farmland from urban development</p>
	<p>Review planning policies and regulations, ensure they are supportive of all residents who want to grow food.</p>
	<p>Promote community gardens and community shared agriculture (including fruit trees, rooftop gardens, vertical gardens, year-round growing systems, etc.) at local schools, hospitals, municipal-run facilities, and new developments.</p>
	<p>Promote the expansion of traditional procurement methods by investing in the education and training of traditional food, such as harvesting, and hunting and gathering.</p>
<p>Strengthen access to and opportunities for food system-related employment training</p>	<p>Invest in education and training in food production and processing to promote careers in the food industry.</p>
	<p>Identify barriers to local food production and continuously problem solve to strengthen opportunities in a way that fits the community.</p>
<p>Increase the number of opportunities for learning and skill development in local food production.</p>	<p>Create and connect the community to experiential learning opportunities.</p>
<p>Support and recognize the international agricultural workers community.</p>	<p>Collaborate with, and continue to support, community groups for international agricultural workers.</p>



## Processing and Distribution and Action Area's

Recommendation	Suggested Actions
Examine the feasibility of establishing a regional food distribution system for schools and other institutions.	Conduct an environmental scan of current distribution practices/networks.
	Connect with local organizations with trucks to build distribution capacity within the local community.
Explore local group purchasing program options (i.e., local childcare centers, school nutrition programs, other non-profits)	Establish a network of local organizations to explore food purchasing barriers and needs.
	Conduct an environmental scan of current purchasing practices by local organizations.
Foster the food innovation and entrepreneurial spirit in Windsor and Essex County	Address gaps in the infrastructure needed to support local and sustainable food processing and distribution.
	Promote programs to help entrepreneurs start a food related business.

## Access and Consumption and Action Area's

Recommendation	Suggested Actions
Develop infrastructure and funding to support community food skills development (e.g., community kitchens, culinary equipment lending libraries, etc.).	Assess the availability of community spaces where people can learn food skills as well as cook for themselves.
	Engage residents to build capacity and share traditional knowledge around food and food systems.
Promote physical access to local foods in all neighbourhoods.	Explore alternative ways to increase access to foods in spaces that have not been traditionally used– parks, libraries, mobile markets.
	Pilot evidence informed programs that improve physical access to food in neighbourhoods with limited retail options
Explore projects that connect consumers and local food producers.	Conduct an environmental scan of current transportation options and routes which can connect consumers to producers.
Create a blueprint for developing a positive food environment in publicly owned facilities.	Create policies for local food requirements in publicly funded spaces.
	Conduct an environmental scan for what percentage of food procured across Windsor and Essex County (restaurants, grocery) is local.

# Food Waste Management and Action Area's

Recommendation	Suggested Actions
<p>Raise awareness around reducing food waste through targeted educational campaigns.</p>	<p>Educate the public on proper waste management, proper food storage, and meal planning to reduce home food waste.</p>
	<p>Educate the public on proper organic waste disposal through composting and green bin options.</p>
<p>Conduct an environmental scan of industrial food waste and explore best practices on how to redirect it away from landfills.</p>	<p>Connect the food industry (i.e., restaurants, grocery stores) with local organizations to donate surplus food, to prevent food waste. Better promote organizations who feed the community so that people know where to donate.</p>

## Next Steps

The 17 recommendations and the 30 suggested actions provide a framework for project implementation to help reach the Food Strategy goals. Looking at two key action areas' (priority and short term), the work can be scoped, and tangible actions can be taken over the next 5 years.

### Priority Actions:

Of the 30 suggested actions listed above, four have been selected as priority actions based on the following criteria:

- Achieved within 2024 – 2029
- Are within local control
- Resources are available for implementation
- Contribute to more than one Food Strategy Goal

#### These priority actions are:

1. Create a food system impact assessment tool to support municipalities in the review of community endeavors and policies on the food system.
2. Assess the availability of community spaces where people can learn food skills, as well as cook for themselves.
3. Create policies for local food requirements in publicly funded spaces.
4. Pilot evidenced informed programs that improve physical access to food in neighbourhoods with limited retail options.

*Appendix A* outlines how these priority actions align with the Food Strategy goals and recommendations.

### Short Term Actions:

There are also many short terms action areas identified that contribute to the Food Strategy goals. These actions are easy because they can be completed within 1-2 years, do not require significant resources and are within the scope of the WECHU and the WEFPC.

#### **Action: Have representatives from all food system sectors actively participant with the WEFPC**

- This action can easily be achieved through the creation of sector specific working groups with the WEFPC, which provide a platform for communication and collaboration.

#### **Action: Establish a standardized data reporting and sharing mechanism to ensure all food system partners of aware of program outcomes**

- WEFPC working groups leverage the WEFPC [food dashboard](#) as a means for data communication.

#### **Action: Create and connect the community to experiential learning opportunities**

- WECHU nutritionist can lead food skills training sessions, with key food system partners to increase the opportunities for learning in the community.

#### **Action: Conduct an environmental scan of current transportation options and routes which can connect consumers to produces**

- The action can achieve with the help of a Nutrition Master's student or dietetic intern under the guidance of a Public Health Nutritionist (dietitian) preceptor.

#### **Action: Conduct an environmental scan for what percentage of food procured across Windsor and Essex County is local**

- The action can achieve with the help of a Nutrition Master’s student or dietetic intern under the guidance of a Public Health Nutritionist (dietitian) preceptor.

**Action: Educate the public on proper waste management, proper food storage and meal planning to reduce home food waste.**

- This action can be achieved in partnership with EWSWA to provide consistent education and resources for the upcoming organic waste program.

## Measuring the Food Strategy’s Success

Establishing baseline measures, from which indicators of success can be determined, can be challenging. Limited data sources, limited data access, inconsistent data measurement tools, and resources to collect data are significant barriers to establishing indicators. Nonetheless, performance measures (or indicators) will be required to help inform the monitoring and evaluation of the Food Strategy.

Using the [City Region Food System Indicator Framework Toolkit](#), indicators for consideration are outlined below. These indicators may need further refining as the work is accomplished.

Food System Component	Indicators
System-Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of advocacy efforts undertaken</li> <li>• Number of partners and stakeholders involved</li> <li>• Number of policies that consider community food security</li> <li>• Number of policies that consider local food procurement</li> </ul>
Food Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of policies to support community members to grow food</li> <li>• Number of urban farms</li> <li>• Percent of agricultural land</li> <li>• Number of new farmers and/or food workers</li> <li>• Number of community experiential learning opportunities</li> </ul>
Processing and Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of community kitchen programs</li> <li>• Number of infrastructure initiatives that support the food sector</li> <li>• Number of types of food distribution channels</li> <li>• Increase in level of local food supply infrastructure e.g. distribution hubs and storage provision</li> </ul>
Access and Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of residents participating in food literacy projects/programs</li> <li>• Percent/number of households experiencing food insecurity</li> <li>• Cost of the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket for Windsor-Essex</li> <li>• Number of food related projects started or implemented</li> <li>• Number of public transport options/routes connecting low-income neighbourhoods to food retail locations</li> </ul>
Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of residents participating in the organic waste program</li> <li>• Number of residents reporting less food waste within the home</li> </ul>

As data is consistently collected, the [local Food System Dashboard](#) will be used as a real time measure of this data as appropriate. In addition, the WEFPC will release a food strategy report card every 4-5 years to highlight successes and show where improvements can be made. This Food Strategy is a living document, therefore the report card will also serve as a time for reflection and updates as the local food system evolves.

## Supporting the Food Strategy Implementation

The Food Strategy implementation is the next step in strengthening the Windsor-Essex food system. After decades of work, this Food Strategy provides tangible actions for system improvement within a single framework to coordinate existing and emerging food issues and actions.

To ensure the effective implementation of the Food Strategy, active involvement of the municipalities, community members, community partners, food industry, etc, is needed. Coordinated efforts will generate opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration for better service delivery, better use of resources, and better decision-making.

## Appendix A: Priority Actions and Potential Projects

Priority Action 1: Create a comprehensive food system assessment tool to determine the impacts of policies and community endeavors on the local food system.

<p><b>Food Strategy Goal Alignment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal 1: Increase access to local, nourishing, traditional, and culturally diverse foods for all residents, by supporting food friendly neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Goal 2: Empower all residents to take action in community, and personal, food decisions.</li> <li>• Goal 3: Make food a centerpiece of Windsor-Essex's Economy.</li> <li>• Goal 4: Establish a healthy, sustainable, and just food system with partners and at all levels of government.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>System-Wide Recommendation</b> Establish a process to ensure that food system impacts are considered during the consultation, planning and implementation of all community initiatives</p>	
<p><b>Potential Project</b> Create a food system impact assessment tool that can be used by municipalities and other institutions to provides a food system lens for new and existing projects</p>	<p><b>Potential Partners Involved</b> Municipal planners WECHU/WEFPC University of Windsor and St. Clair College Boards of Education</p>

Priority Action 2: Assess the availability of community spaces where people can learn food skills, as well as cook for themselves.

<p><b>Food Strategy Goal Alignment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal 1: Increase access to local, nourishing, traditional, and culturally diverse foods for all residents, by supporting food friendly neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Goal 2: Empower all residents to take action in community, and personal, food decisions.</li> <li>• Goal 3: Make food a centerpiece of Windsor-Essex's Economy.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Access and Consumption Recommendation</b> Develop infrastructure and funding to support community food skills development (e.g., community kitchens)</p>	
<p><b>Potential Project</b> Using the finding from the availability assessment, provided recommendations for infrastructure changes to increase spaces of community food skill development</p>	<p><b>Potential Partners Involved</b> WECHU/WEFPC Municipal staff members – parks and rec, poverty reduction services, environmental office, etc.</p>

Priority Action 3: The development, or enhancement of, policies and procedures to support local food purchasing in publicly funded spaces

<p><b>Food Strategy Goal Alignment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal 1: Increase access to local, nourishing, traditional, and culturally diverse foods for all residents, by supporting food friendly neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Goal 2: Empower all residents to take action in community, and personal, food decisions.</li> <li>• Goal 3: Make food a centerpiece of Windsor-Essex’s Economy.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Access and Consumption Recommendation</b> Create a blueprint for developing a positive food environment in publicly owned facilities</p>	
<p><b>Potential Project</b> Draft sample policies for publicly funded institutions to set benchmarks for local food procurement.</p>	<p><b>Potential Partners Involved</b> WECHU/WEFPC Municipal staff members – parks and rec, poverty reduction services, environmental office, etc.</p>

Priority Action 4: Pilot evidenced informed programs that improve physical access to food in neighbourhoods with limited retail options.

<p><b>Food Strategy Goal Alignment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal 1: Increase access to local, nourishing, traditional, and culturally diverse foods for all residents, by supporting food friendly neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Goal 2: Empower all residents to take action in community, and personal, food decisions.</li> <li>• Goal 3: Make food a centerpiece of Windsor-Essex’s Economy.</li> <li>• Goal 4: Establish a healthy, sustainable, and just food system with partners and at all levels of government.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Access and Consumption Recommendation</b> Promote physical access to local foods in all neighbourhoods</p>	
<p><b>Potential Project</b> Review literature and best practice policies to create a pilot project to improve neighbourhood food access. Implement and evaluate findings.</p>	<p><b>Potential Partners Involved</b> WECHU/WEFPC Municipal staff members Community food programs Indigenous food leaders Neighbourhood ambassadors</p>