

ORILLIA AND AREA Food Strategy

Building a healthy and sustainable local food system for everyone.



April 2026

Orillia and Area Food Strategy (OAFS)

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Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that the Orillia & Area Food Strategy was developed on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, specifically the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, a member of the Chippewa Tri-Council and Three Fires Confederacy. This land continues to be home to many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, whose relationships with food, land, and water have sustained communities and ecosystems here for thousands of years.

We honour the deep and enduring knowledge Indigenous Peoples hold as stewards of this territory, knowledge of harvesting, fishing, growing, and preparing food that long preceded and continues to enrich the food systems we depend on today. This land is home to one of North America's oldest human food infrastructure developments, the Mnjikaning Fish Weirs, a testament to the ingenuity, sustainability, and food sovereignty of the Anishinaabeg.

We acknowledge that this land is covered by the Williams Treaties and Upper Canada Treaties and was once part of the Coldwater-Narrows Reserve. We recognize that colonization, including the disruption of traditional food systems, the restriction of harvesting and fishing rights, and the legacy of residential schools, has had a profound and lasting impact on Indigenous food security, health, and cultural identity.

The Orillia and Area Food Strategy is committed to building a food system that is welcoming, inclusive, and grounded in a genuine commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. We believe that food sovereignty, the right of peoples to define and shape their own food systems, is central to healing and to justice. We move forward with respect, equity, and dignity for all Indigenous Peoples, past, present, and future, and with a commitment to listen, learn, and act in partnership.

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Orillia and Area Food Strategy (OAFS)

The Orillia and Area Food Strategy was developed at the direction of the City of Orillia's Food Access and Sustainability Working Group (OFASWG), whose members provided ongoing oversight, guidance, and accountability throughout the process.

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Executive Summary

The Orillia and Area Food Strategy (OAFS) is a community-developed strategic framework to guide coordinated action on the local food system. Every community has a food system, and in Orillia and the surrounding area this system shapes and is shaped by health, affordability, economic vitality, and community well-being, yet often remains invisible in day-to-day decision making. The OAFS makes the local food system visible and actionable by highlighting its role in advancing equity and social well-being, supporting a diverse and resilient local economy, and strengthening environmental sustainability and climate resilience. It supports decision makers, partners, and communities in aligning policies and programs across these goals to build a stronger food system over time. The Strategy does not prescribe specific projects or funding commitments but instead identifies shared priorities and directions for collaboration across the region.

The OAFS was developed at the direction of Orillia City Council and through the mandate of the OFASWG, a multi-sector advisory body supporting food systems collaboration in the region. While initiated in the City of Orillia, the strategy recognizes that the immediate food system extends across the region comprised by the Townships of Oro-Medonte, Severn, and Ramara, and the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, and is shaped by provincial and federal policy directions, market dynamics, and supply chain conditions beyond municipal borders. Recent federal commitments to a National Food Security Strategy (2025) and a National School Food Policy (2024) reinforce the value of local readiness and coordination.

The OAFS was shaped through a broad, community driven engagement process involving residents, youth, farmers, food businesses, educators, Indigenous partners, public health professionals, and municipal and county staff. Across all engagement activities, consistent themes emerged: food insecurity is driven by income, housing costs, and affordability; school food and food literacy are high priorities; infrastructure gaps limit what farmers and food businesses can do; land access and pathways for new producers are critical; and people want coordinated, tangible action.

These themes directly inform five pillars: **food production, food infrastructure and the local food economy, school food and food education, food access, and household food insecurity**. Each pillar includes strategic pathways that set clear direction for collaboration, policy alignment, and future action planning. These pathways are not an implementation plan or a funding commitment; they reflect where the community is most aligned and where action can make the greatest difference. All five pillars are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and guided by the priorities of equity, climate and environment, culture and food literacy, Indigenous food sovereignty, and policy. These priorities keep the strategy grounded in fairness, sustainability, and long-term resilience.

OAFS implementation will unfold through a phased approach: beginning with collaborative partner engagement and action planning, moving into governance and coordination, and culminating in a Food System Dashboard to track progress, support accountability, and adapt to emerging needs over time. The Sharing Place Food Centre will continue to act as the coordinating organization, working alongside the OFASWG and a growing network of community, regional, and institutional partners.

The OAFS is a milestone, built by the community, for the community, and designed to grow stronger as partners engage, relationships deepen, and the food system continues to evolve.

Using this Strategic Framework

The OAFS is a strategic framework designed to:

- Align priorities and actions across multiple jurisdictions and sectors
- Clarify where collaboration, policy alignment, and advocacy are most needed
- Support evidence-based decision making related to food systems

The OAFS does not assign responsibility for actions to any one partner, nor does it imply automatic funding or staffing commitments. Actions that require municipal resources will include separate analysis, costing, and approval through future reports to Council.

Many strategic pathways can be led by, or shared among, community organizations, public institutions, Indigenous partners, food producers and businesses, the County of Simcoe, other municipalities, and residents. This reflects the reality that food systems operate across jurisdictions and sectors and cannot be advanced by any single organization.

Context & Rationale

Introduction & Background

The OAFS was developed in response to Council's interest in strengthening food access and sustainability, and through the mandate of the Food Access and Sustainability Working Group. Food systems planning is increasingly being recognized as foundational to health, economic development, climate resilience, and community well-being in Orillia and the surrounding region (Food Communities Network, 2022).

Regional Food System Foundations

The [development of a Regional Food Strategy for Orillia](#) and Area builds on years of foundational work across Orillia and the surrounding area:

- **2013:** The Simcoe County Food and Agriculture Charter was officially launched in February 2013 and subsequently endorsed by Simcoe County's member municipalities, as well as the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia.
- **2014:** Formation of the Orillia Food Council
- **2018:** Creation of an Orillia Food Committee by Orillia City Council
- **2019:** Launch of the Simcoe County Food Security Framework and formation of the Simcoe County Food Council
- **2021:** The Growing Change Report, completed by the Orillia Food Committee, which later evolved into the Orillia Food Access and Sustainability Working Group.
- **2024:** Orillia City Council formally directs the development of a regional food strategy for Orillia and the surrounding area

What Is a Food System

A food system includes everything from production, processing, distribution, access, and consumption to waste management and stewardship. It touches land use, economic development, health, environment, and community connection. Everyone is affected by our food

systems, as they include everything that happens from farm to fork: growing, processing, moving, selling, eating, sharing, and managing waste. It also includes education, policies, and community programs that affect how we access and value food.

Understanding food as a system helps shift decision making from isolated actions to coordinated solutions. It allows communities and governments to identify shared priorities, reduce duplication, address food system drivers, and align efforts across sectors. This systems based approach underpins the OAFS and informs its pillars, pathways, and priorities.

Local Impact: Why Food System Planning Matters

Local priorities, such as household food insecurity, food access, economic development, and climate resilience, require coordinated action across sectors. Orillia and the surrounding areas face distinct challenges, including rising food costs and infrastructure gaps, as well as opportunities such as strong community partnerships. For Indigenous governments and local governments, supporting local food systems reduces reliance on imports, strengthens resilience, and provides fresher, culturally appropriate foods. Local food systems also promote economic growth, support the stewardship of land and water, and foster community advocacy for equitable and sustainable change.

Alignment with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

The OAFS is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a globally recognized framework adopted by Canada to guide action on health, equity, sustainability, and community well-being.

Food systems sit at the intersection of many SDGs. Decisions about food affect poverty and affordability, health, education, climate action, economic development, land stewardship, and partnerships. Integrating the SDGs helps make these connections visible and supports a more coordinated, systems-based approach.

The SDGs are used in this Strategy as a shared reference framework, not as targets or commitments. They help:

- Connect local food system priorities to widely recognized outcomes
- Support consistency with municipal, regional, provincial, and federal policy directions
- Inform future monitoring and reporting by linking local indicators to established global measures
- Strengthen alignment with funders, research partners, and intergovernmental initiatives

Each pillar of the Strategy highlights the SDGs it most directly supports, showing how local actions in Orillia and the surrounding area advance broader goals while staying grounded in community priorities.

Alongside the SDGs, the OAFS recognizes the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact as a framework for municipal food system action.

[Milan Urban Food Policy Pact \(MUFPP\)](#)

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is an international agreement among cities committed to developing sustainable urban food systems. Signed by over 330 cities worldwide, including Halifax, Nova Scotia, which spans urban and rural districts, similar to Orillia and area. MUFPP provides a practical framework of 37 recommended actions across governance, sustainable diets, equity, food production, supply and distribution, and food waste.

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The OAFS is already in alignment with key indicators from the MUFPP framework and will explore which of the 37 actions might align with ongoing or future initiatives across the region. Integrating MUFPP provides a basis for consistent monitoring and comparison with other municipalities, enhancing benchmarking and knowledge exchange. As implementation advances, partners may also consider whether formal participation in MUFPP, such as signing the Pact, could add value by further connecting the area to a growing network of municipalities that are advancing food systems action. MUFPP may be used as one option for monitoring and reporting as the Strategy evolves.

Youth and Equity

Food systems decisions made today will shape the health, environment, and economic and social connection opportunities available to young people for decades to come. Childhood and adolescence are critical periods for physical development, mental well-being, skill building, and habit formation, which makes food environments especially influential during these life stages. Our diets are a major driver of preventable chronic disease risk, and global evidence shows dietary risks contribute to millions of deaths each year, underscoring the value of prevention through healthier food environments, shaped by our food system (Ma et al., 2025).

Food systems also shape learning and participation. Evidence from school meal research shows that improving access to nutritious food can support diet quality and is often associated with improved academic outcomes and attendance, particularly when programs reduce barriers and stigma (Hernandez et al., 2018). Beyond health and learning, food systems are a defining factor in the world today's youth will inherit. Agrifood systems account for roughly one third of human caused greenhouse gas emissions, and global food production is widely recognized as a major driver of biodiversity loss (FAO, 2023). Strengthening local, sustainable food systems is therefore an issue of intergenerational equity: it helps ensure young people inherit a food system that supports health, environmental stability, and meaningful livelihoods.

Vision and Guiding Principles

A clear vision and guiding principles anchor the OAFS in shared values and priorities. They reflect what the community and food partners want to achieve, and guide decision-making as the OAFS moves from planning to action. These statements were shaped through guidance from the Simcoe County Food Charter and engagement with the advisory group, and are intended to keep the OAFS focused, equitable, and responsive. They reflect the region's commitment to health, equity, sustainability, and collaboration.

Vision:

A sustainable, equitable, and secure local food system in Orillia and the surrounding area that fosters health and strengthens community well-being for generations to come.

Guiding Principles:

- **Food is a Human Right:** Everyone deserves access to safe, dignified, nutritious, and sufficient food.
- **Thriving Local Economy:** A strong food system supports local farms, food businesses, and fair livelihoods.
- **Empowered Communities:** Local leadership, knowledge, innovation, and equity build food security.

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- **Collaboration for Change:** Working together across sectors, communities, and cultures ensures progress.
- **Honouring Culture and Identity:** Celebrate diverse food traditions and cultural foodways across the region and uphold Indigenous food sovereignty.
- **Stewardship of Land and Environment:** Protect farmland, water, ecosystems, and climate resilience.
- **Food as a Connector:** Food strengthens health, justice, community, economy, and public policy.
- **Resourced for Resilience:** Sustained funding, time, and support are essential to lasting impact.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

The OAFS recognizes that Indigenous food systems, rights, and governance are foundational to the health and resilience of our regional food system. Meaningful partnership with Indigenous communities, including the Chippewas of Rama First Nation and other Williams Treaties Nations, requires respect for protocols, recognition of rights, and a commitment to co-governance and learning. As we work toward a more equitable and sustainable food system, it is essential to honour Indigenous food sovereignty, knowledge, and leadership.

The Chippewas of Rama First Nation maintain inherent rights and responsibilities to the lands and waters that sustain food within their Traditional Territory. Their Consultation and Accommodation Standards Protocol (2020) outlines obligations to engage Rama First Nation when decisions affect traditional food sources, including wild rice beds, fisheries, harvesting and hunting areas, and culturally important plants. The OAFS also acknowledges the rights and interests of other Williams Treaties Nations whose territories and food systems intersect with the Orillia and Area region.

Indigenous food systems are land, water, and relationship based, grounded in cultural, ecological, and governance practices that have supported communities for generations. Colonization has disrupted these systems through land dispossession, restrictions on harvesting, and the erosion of traditional governance. Revitalizing Indigenous food systems strengthens ecological health and benefits all communities who share these lands.

Indigenous food systems are living knowledge systems that continue to shape what we eat today. Many foods commonly grown, harvested, and celebrated across this region, including corn, squash, wild rice, and maple syrup, are Indigenous in origin, developed and stewarded by First Nations long before colonization. Learning the true origins of local foods, and the Indigenous knowledge embedded in their production, offers an opportunity to correct our understanding, deepen respect, and celebrate the richness of Indigenous food cultures that continue to sustain communities across this region today.

The significance of Indigenous food systems in this region is evident at Mnjikaning (the Place of the Fish Fence), located at the narrows between Lake Couchiching and Lake Simcoe. Designated a National Historic Site of Canada, the Mnjikaning Fish Weirs are among the oldest known examples of food infrastructure in Canada, with archaeological evidence showing continuous use for more than 5,000 years. These complex wooden fish weirs demonstrate sophisticated Indigenous knowledge of ecology, engineering, governance, and sustainable harvest, and continue to hold deep cultural, spiritual, and food system significance for the Chippewas of Rama First Nation and other Indigenous Nations connected to this place.

The OAFS recognizes these truths and affirms that Indigenous Peoples are rights holders whose food sovereignty, protocols, and knowledge systems must guide decisions that affect their foodlands. The OAFS does not define Indigenous food systems or speak on behalf of Indigenous communities.

Alignment with Municipal, Regional, Provincial, and Federal Policy

The OAFS is designed to complement and strengthen the diverse frameworks that already recognize food as foundational to health, community well-being, and sustainable development across the region. Rather than duplicating existing plans, the OAFS connects and aligns them through a food systems lens, supporting coordinated action and shared priorities.

Food system priorities intersect with core areas of municipal and regional responsibility, including:

- **Planning and policy:** Official Plans, zoning, and land use policies that influence where food can be produced, sold, shared, and accessed
- **Economic development:** Local food business development, market viability, workforce development, and agri-food innovation
- **Recreation and facilities:** Public spaces and community facilities as food learning hubs, gathering spaces, and sites for gardens, markets, and programming
- **Poverty reduction and social supports:** Addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity through integrated strategies
- **Emergency management:** Food resilience, preparedness, and continuity during disruptions and emergencies
- **Climate action:** Mitigation and adaptation related to food production, distribution, waste reduction, and climate resilience
- **Waste reduction and circular economy:** Preventing food loss and waste, supporting organics diversion, and advancing circular food systems

These priorities are reflected in a range of existing municipal and regional plans and initiatives, such as Community Safety and Well-Being Plans, Official Plans, Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plans, Climate Action Plans, Poverty Reduction Strategies, Waste Reduction and Resource Recovery Plans, Economic Development Strategies, and the priorities of the County of Simcoe and Simcoe County Food Council.

The OAFS aligns with Indigenous relations, reconciliation, and rights based frameworks, recognizing Indigenous Peoples in the region as rights holders and self-determining governments with distinct governance, planning priorities, and protocols. The Strategy emphasizes partnership, co-governance, and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems wherever food system actions intersect with Indigenous foodlands and traditional food sources.

At the provincial level, the OAFS is consistent with key policy directions, including Ontario's Local Food Act, 2013, the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 and the Grow Ontario Agri-Food Strategy. These frameworks collectively support resilient local and regional food systems, agricultural land protection, economic growth, and sustainable food production.

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Federally, the OAFS aligns with emerging directions such as the National Food Security Strategy (announced January 2026) and the draft Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, 2026-2029, which emphasize food security, poverty reduction, and the resilience and sustainability of Canadian agriculture as well as the National School Food Policy.

By articulating shared priorities, partnerships, and areas for coordinated action, the OAFS helps position Orillia and the surrounding region to engage effectively with future provincial and federal initiatives as they emerge. This alignment demonstrates that the OAFS is credible, collaborative, and grounded in municipal, regional, provincial, and federal priorities. While each area has unique needs, they share a vision of inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities. The OAFS serves as a unifying framework that links these goals through the lens of the food system, translating existing planning into coordinated food action.

For a detailed summary of how the OAFS aligns with specific municipal, regional, provincial and federal plans, see **Appendix A: Policy and Planning Alignment**.

What We Heard: Public Engagement

The OAFS was shaped through a broad, community driven engagement process involving residents, youth, farmers, food businesses, educators, community organizations, Indigenous partners, public health, and municipal and county staff.

Engagement activities included a community open house, topic focused working sessions, youth focused discussions, sector specific consultations, community presentations, an ongoing community survey and a postcard engagement campaign with food bank clients, capturing lived experience perspectives from people directly affected by food insecurity.

Engagement was further supported through newsletters, social media, and informal outreach at community events such as farmers' markets, community events and festivals. Detailed engagement methods and summaries are provided in **Appendix B: Community Engagement Summaries**.

Across all engagement activities, several consistent themes emerged:

- **Affordability matters most.** Organizations, residents, and youth clearly articulated that household food insecurity is driven by income, housing, and cost of living pressures, rather than food shortages and affects almost all other issues.
- **School food and food education are high priorities.** There was strong alignment around the importance of consistent, dignified school food programs and practical food skills and knowledge that support learning, health, and long-term well-being.
- **Infrastructure gaps limit progress.** Farmers and food businesses emphasized challenges related to processing, storage, aggregation, distribution, and access to certified kitchens.
- **Land access and next generation pathways are critical.** Protecting farmland and creating realistic entry points for new and young producers were repeatedly identified as critical issues for the region's food system.

- **People want action and clarity.** Participants consistently asked for focused, tangible next steps, and clear ways to stay engaged as the Strategy moves from planning to implementation.


These themes directly informed the OAFS's five pillars and the strategic pathways within each.


Detailed summaries of engagement activities are included in **Appendix B: Community Engagement Summaries**. A summary of findings from the community and organization survey is included in **Appendix C: Survey Summary**. A full list acknowledging contributing organizations is included in **Appendix D: Contributing Organizations Community Partners**


Guiding Priorities


All strategic pathways in the OAFS are informed by guiding priorities that shape decision-making and progress measurement. These priorities guide partners in keeping the Strategy focused on equity, sustainability, and community priorities.


The OAFS guiding priorities include:

 **Climate & Environment:** addressing food as both a driver of and a solution to climate and environmental challenges, while building resilience through sustainable practices.

 **Culture & Food Literacy:** honouring and supporting diverse foodways, knowledge, and skills as foundations of community connection and well-being.

 **Equity:** centring dignity, access, and inclusion, particularly for those most affected by household food insecurity and systemic barriers.

 **Indigenous Food Sovereignty:** recognizing Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and respecting their jurisdiction, knowledge systems, and relationships to land and food.

 **Policy:** framing food as a shared responsibility across governments and institutions, and integrating it into planning, economic, health, and social policy.

These priorities support the OAFS to ensure that actions across all pillars reinforce long-term resilience, justice, and sustainability.

The Orillia and Area Food Strategy Framework

Overview of the Pillars and Pathways

The OAFS is organized around five pillars that reflect the most urgent and interconnected priorities identified through community engagement. Together, the pillars provide a shared framework for understanding how different parts of the food system interact, and where coordinated action can make the greatest difference.

Each pillar includes a small number of strategic pathways that describe priority directions for collaboration, policy alignment, and future action planning. These pathways are not

implementation plans or funding commitments. Rather, they help focus collective effort, guide decision-making, and create a foundation for implementation planning and monitoring.

Youth perspectives, equity considerations, Indigenous rights and food sovereignty, climate and environmental impacts, and policy implications are woven throughout all pillars. This reflects what we heard through engagement: food system decisions made today shape health, opportunity, and resilience for current and future generations.

How Pillar Sections Are Structured

Each pillar section follows a consistent structure:

- Pillar title and icon
- Strategic vision (“Where we want to be”)
- Why this pillar matters (local context and gaps)
- Current strengths related to each pillar
- Strategic pathway tables
- Connections to guiding priorities
- Sample indicators for future progress measurement
- Alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This approach ensures each pillar is grounded in evidence, aligned with community priorities, and ready for implementation and monitoring.

Pillars, Pathways & Priorities

Pillar: Food Production

Where We Want to Be

A resilient, diversified regional food system where farmers, growers, and producers can thrive; agricultural lands and waters are protected and well stewarded; and communities participate in growing food at multiple scales. Production in our region, from commercial farms and agri-businesses to smaller producers, community gardens, and greenhouses, supports local economies, honours Indigenous sovereignty, protects ecosystems, and builds climate resilience through regenerative practices.

Why This Pillar Matters

Food production is the foundation of a strong regional food system and is understood broadly to include both cultivated and harvested foods. This includes agriculture, fishing, hunting and foraging. Across Simcoe County, farms, greenhouses, and community growers and harvesters sustain local food access, preserve landscapes, and support rural livelihoods. Local production includes field crops, dairy and livestock, greenhouse and horticultural products, harvested foods, as well as specialty items such as honey and maple syrup.

Protecting agricultural land is urgent. Between 2011 and 2016, Ontario lost an average of 175 acres of farmland per day, a rate that nearly doubled between 2016 and 2021 to approximately 319 acres per day (Ontario Farmland Trust, 2022). These losses are not reversible. Once farmland is converted to other uses, it is rarely returned to production. Local planning decisions

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that protect prime agricultural areas are among the most consequential food system actions available to municipalities.

Producer viability is increasingly under pressure. Rising land costs, limited access to capital, restrictive zoning, climate impacts, and an aging farmer population make it difficult for both established and new producers to succeed. Youth and new entrants expressed interest in food production but identified significant barriers to participation, including land access, affordability, and limited visibility of agriculture as a viable and supported career pathway. Gaps in mentoring, training, and land access pathways further limit opportunities for the next generation of producers.

Agricultural lands across Oro-Medonte, Severn, Ramara, and Orillia overlap with Indigenous Traditional Territories. Planning decisions related to land, water, and infrastructure can affect foodlands, harvesting corridors, and culturally important species. Recognizing these relationships strengthens stewardship and supports Indigenous food sovereignty.

The adaptive capacity of the regional food system, including infrastructure, access to labour and financing, and support for producers transitioning away from high emission practices, will shape our community's ability to respond to the health and economic impacts of climate change. Strengthening local food production and the agricultural workforce is therefore both a food security and a climate resilience strategy.

A strong and diverse local production base reduces dependence on external supply chains, strengthens food security, supports meaningful livelihoods for young people, and builds climate resilience for the entire region. Supporting the next generation of producers is not only a workforce issue, it is a long-term resilience strategy that depends on protecting the land, relationships, and knowledge systems that make food production possible.



Current Community Strengths

- Diverse agriculture across Oro-Medonte, Severn, Ramara Townships and Rama First Nation with strong dairy, grain, livestock, horticultural and specialty product production.
- Recognition of prime agricultural area protection through the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, which requires municipalities to protect agricultural lands and support on-farm diversification.
- County of Simcoe's Agricultural Development program and Economic Development Strategy recognize agriculture as a priority sector.
- Existing networks such as the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, National Farmers Union (Simcoe-Dufferin), Christian Farmers Federation and local farmers' market organizations across Orillia and the surrounding area, which support direct-to-consumer sales, farmer viability, and community food access.
- Lake Simcoe Regional Conservational Authority funding and programs to support more ecological farming practices.
- Emerging momentum around local procurement and farm-to-institution connections.
- Community scale growing initiatives that complement commercial production.




Strategic Pathways

Pathway	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
1.1 Protect and enable farmland through policy that supports farm viability and long-term stewardship	<p>Strengthen protections and enabling policies that support farm viability, land stewardship, and long-term food production capacity across the region.</p> <p>Explore mechanisms to better facilitate on-farm diversification and value-added activities for the agricultural sector.</p>	<p>County and municipal planning, producer organizations, conservation partners, agricultural sector partners, Indigenous partners</p>
1.2 Support new and next generation producers through land access tools, mentorship, and hands-on learning pathways	<p>Expand practical pathways for youth and new entrants (e.g., mentorship, internships), pursue land access solutions (e.g., land matching, rental arrangements).</p>	<p>Farms and producer networks, schools, Specialist High Skills pathways, post-secondary partners, land access initiatives, municipal economic development and planning teams.</p>
1.3 Advance climate resilient and stewardship practices across the production landscape	<p>Support practical stewardship and resilience actions that protect soils, water, and ecological health, and reflect lived experience of climate impacts on food.</p>	<p>Farmers/producers, conservation groups, public health, academic partners, Indigenous partners</p>

Connection to Guiding Priorities

Priority	Connection
 Equity	<p>Supports inclusive entry points for new, young, and newcomer farmers; advances Indigenous food sovereignty and stewardship through partnerships with Indigenous partners; and fosters equitable access to land and resources for all producers.</p>
 Policy	<p>Aligns with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement on Supporting Local Food and the Agri-Food Network, and with Simcoe County's</p>

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	Economic Development Strategy focus on farmland protection, diversification, and processing capacity.
 Indigenous Food Sovereignty	Upholds Indigenous rights to steward lands, waters, and food systems in their Traditional Territories, encouraging agricultural decisions that respect Indigenous foodlands and ecological knowledge.
 Culture & Food Literacy	Recognizes farming, growing, and harvesting as knowledge rich cultural practices shaped by land, place, and community. Strengthening food literacy includes increasing understanding of where food comes from, supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer, and making food production more visible and accessible as a meaningful livelihood and cultural practice.
 Climate & Environment	Promotes regenerative and climate smart agriculture to reduce emissions, restore soils, and protect ecosystems. Strengthening local production also reduces and builds regional resilience to climate disruptions.

Sample Indicators

- Total area of farmland preserved for food production for local or regional markets.
- Number and diversity of active farms by size, type, and ownership.
- Acres of agricultural land converted to non-agricultural use per year
- Rate of farmland loss in the region over five year census periods
- Average age of farm operators and number of new entrants supported.
- Number of participants in mentorship, apprenticeship, or micro-grant programs.
- Percentage of farms participating in recognized stewardship, conservation, or climate-related programs or initiatives.
- Number of municipal policies or zoning updates supporting farmland protection or diversification.
- Number of partnerships or programs integrating Indigenous knowledge or practices in land stewardship or food production.
- Participation in agri-tourism or cultural food learning initiatives across the region.

SDG Alignment

This pillar contributes to the following SDGs:

SDG 2: Zero Hunger - supporting sustainable food production and access to nutritious, locally grown food.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth - strengthening farm viability and creating fair, green jobs within the local agri-food sector.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities - by integrating farmland protection and food production into land use planning and community design.

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production - promoting regenerative practices, efficient resource use, and shorter supply chains.

SDG 13: Climate Action - building resilience to climate change through soil health, water protection, and sustainable land management.

SDG 15: Life on Land - conserving farmland, pollinator habitats, and biodiversity through integrated land stewardship.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals - fostering collaboration among farmers, Indigenous communities, municipalities, and regional partners to strengthen the local food system.

Pillar: Food Infrastructure & The Local Food Economy

Where We Want to Be

A connected, regionally coordinated network of facilities, services, and markets that enable food grown in our region to be stored, processed, distributed, and sold locally. Farmers, processors, and food entrepreneurs have affordable access to infrastructure and financing. Institutions and households can buy local through reliable regional supply chains. The result is a resilient local food economy that creates good jobs, reduces waste, strengthens climate resilience and local supply chains, and keeps food dollars circulating in our communities.

Why This Pillar Matters

Even when food is grown nearby, it often cannot move efficiently from farms to eaters because of missing links in aggregation, storage, processing, and distribution. Across the region, small and medium sized producers face long travel distances, limited access to cold storage, and barriers to meeting institutional procurement requirements. Schools, long-term care homes, hospitals, and community programs want to buy local food but often lack the infrastructure, consistency, and policy tools needed to ensure reliable supply, food safety, and straightforward procurement systems. Strengthening infrastructure for aggregation, storage, processing, and redistribution also creates opportunities to reduce food loss and waste. These gaps echo priorities identified in the County of Simcoe's Agriculture and Agri-Food Value Chain Work Plan, reinforcing the need for coordinated regional action.

Culturally diverse and newcomer led food businesses are also an important part of the regional food economy, that reflect the community's changing demographics. These businesses contribute to employment and entrepreneurship and can strengthen access to culturally meaningful foods when supported by appropriate infrastructure, procurement pathways, and regulatory navigation.

Youth identified food related employment, entrepreneurship, and skill building as important pathways to future opportunity. Strengthening local food infrastructure, such as shared processing spaces, distribution hubs, and market channels, can support meaningful work, innovation, and economic participation for young people, while also improving viability for farmers and food businesses.

If the Food Production pillar focuses on growing the food, the Food Infrastructure & Local Food Economy pillar focuses on moving, transforming, and buying the food. Together, these complementary areas form the backbone of a resilient regional food system. This pillar supports farmers, strengthens local supply chains, creates pathways for workforce development and

entrepreneurship, and helps ensure that food produced in the region is available and accessible within local communities.

Current Community Strengths

- County and municipal plans’ recognition of agriculture and agri-food as economic priorities (County of Simcoe, 2019 Food Security Framework Goal 5).
- Active farmers’ markets, independent retailers, and growing consumer demand for local products
- Newcomer and culturally diverse food businesses that contribute to local entrepreneurship, employment, and culturally meaningful food access
- Growing institutional interest in local procurement, supported by BOBIA (2024). (Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2024) enabling preference for Ontario suppliers
- Regional resources such as the [Simcoe County Agritourism Toolkit \(2023\)](#) and SMDHU food business guidelines already provide regulatory and business navigation materials.
- Ongoing collaboration among the County of Simcoe, Simcoe County Food Council, municipalities, and academic partners on food infrastructure mapping, data, and policy alignment.






Strategic Pathways

Pathways & Priorities	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
2.1 Map and prioritize regional food infrastructure gaps (processing, storage, aggregation, distribution)	Build shared evidence base on infrastructure assets and gaps so investments and pilots target the biggest bottlenecks.	Municipal economic development, producers, processors, distributors, post-secondary partners, Simcoe County Food Council.
2.2 Expand shared use processing capacity and certified kitchen access for producers and food entrepreneurs	Increase affordable access to compliant processing and kitchen space so small producers and food entrepreneurs can scale safely and feasibly.	Municipalities, SMDHU, funders, food entrepreneurs, community kitchens, business supports.
2.3 Develop aggregation and distribution solutions that reduce delivery burdens and increase reliable supply	Pilot and support practical aggregation and delivery models.	Distributors, producers, anchor institutions, County/municipal partners, food programs.

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Pathways & Priorities	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
2.4 Strengthen local market access, including farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer channels	Improve market viability and accessibility (vendor mix, location, access) and recognize markets as both sales channels and public education spaces.	Market operators, producers, municipalities, Business Improvement Areas, community partners.
2.5 Advance farm-to-institution procurement readiness (schools and other institutions)	Build vendor readiness and procurement pathways so institutions can buy local more reliably, strengthening both school food and the local economy.	School boards, institutions, producers, procurement staff, farm-to-institution networks, Simcoe County Food Council tables.

Connection to Guiding Priorities

Priority	Connection
 Equity	Lowers barriers for smaller food entrepreneurs through shared infrastructure, vendor navigation, and fair finance. Builds local ownership in the food economy.
 Policy	Aligns with Simcoe County's Food Security Framework Goal 5 and municipal economic development priorities to integrate food infrastructure into planning and policy.
 Indigenous Food Sovereignty	Supports Indigenous food sovereignty by ensuring food infrastructure and economic development respect Indigenous land rights and create space for Indigenous-led food enterprises and markets.
 Culture & Food Literacy	Supports food entrepreneurship, skill-building-, and innovation by strengthening practical knowledge related to processing, food safety, business development, and market navigation. Food infrastructure can also function as learning spaces that build workforce skills, celebrate local food culture, and support culturally relevant food businesses.
 Climate & Environment	Strengthens regional resilience through shorter supply chains, reduced and sustainable local production and processing.

Sample Indicators

- Number of local food processors, commercial kitchens, and shared-use or micro-hub facilities operating in the region.
- Number of publicly-funded institutions with local food procurement policies and/or targets.
- Estimated proportion of institutional or retail food spending directed to local suppliers.

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- Number of retail stores, markets, or online platforms featuring locally produced food products.
- Number of active farmers' markets, farm-gate sellers, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and pick-your-own operations across the Orillia and Area region.
- Number of food businesses participating in food recovery, redistribution, or waste reduction programs.
- Number of municipal or County policies, plans, or zoning updates that include local food infrastructure or procurement goals.
- Participation in local food, culture, or agri-tourism experiences (e.g., trails, festivals, tours, events).

SDG Alignment

This pillar contributes to the following SDGs:

SDG 2: Zero Hunger – strengthening local food supply chains and ensuring access to nutritious, locally produced food.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth – fostering entrepreneurship, small business growth, and fair employment in the local agri-food sector.

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure – building shared facilities, logistics networks, and market systems that enable a resilient regional food economy.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – embedding food infrastructure into community and economic planning.

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production – supporting short supply chains, waste reduction, and local food recovery.

SDG 13: Climate Action – reducing transportation emissions and strengthening regional resilience through localized production and distribution.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals – promoting collaboration among municipalities, Indigenous partners, educational institutions, and community organizations to strengthen regional food systems.

Pillar: School Food & Food Education

Where We Want to Be

Every student in our region has access to nutritious food at school every day, through a well-resourced and coordinated school food program that enhances learning, health, and belonging. This includes access to breakfast and lunch, and where appropriate, additional food supports delivered through partnerships with community organizations and existing programs.

Everyone in our region, from students to older adults, has meaningful opportunities for food learning. Schools, recreation and community centres, and gardens and greenhouses, community kitchens and dining rooms serve as places where people can learn about food and build skills that strengthen health, environment, and community connection.

Why This Pillar Matters

Food and learning are deeply connected. When students have access to nourishing food at school, they are better able to learn, focus, and participate. Yet across our region, school food

programs are stretched thin, operating on limited funding, volunteer capacity, and inconsistent infrastructure. Many programs struggle to meet high demand, and most schools lack the resources needed to offer daily, reliable food to every student who needs it.

Food learning has also changed. Families are cooking less at home, and schools have limited time and space for food skills, nutrition education, or hands-on learning. One outcome of this shift has been a greater reliance on convenience and ultra-processed foods, which are often more accessible, affordable, and familiar than home-prepared meals. This loss of food literacy has weakened connections to where food comes from, how to prepare it, and how food relates to culture, the environment, and community health. The report from Public Health Ontario and Cancer Care Ontario (2019) estimates that the economic burden of unhealthy eating in Ontario is \$5.6 billion each year, including \$1.8 billion linked to low fruit and vegetable intake, underscoring the costs of inaction.

Land based learning and Indigenous food knowledge are important parts of the wider food learning landscape. These approaches connect learners to land, seasonality, stewardship, and the responsibilities that come with harvesting and growing food. Opportunities exist to support Indigenous led food education when partners have capacity, including gardens that feature native species, stewardship practices, or teachings shared by Indigenous educators, Elders, or knowledge keepers. This learning can affirm histories of food and understanding that Indigenous food systems are living systems, grounded in place, culture and ongoing stewardship today.

Research consistently shows that integrating food into education benefits students academically, socially, and nutritionally. School food programs not only address immediate food access needs but can also model nutritious, sustainable eating habits. They help normalize the idea that good food for all children is a public investment, not a charity model, and can strengthen connections between students and local producers. Food learning opportunities can celebrate diverse cultures and food traditions while creating welcoming spaces where students and community members learn from one another through cooking, gardening, and shared meals.

New momentum, including the federal commitment to a National School Food Program and renewed provincial interest in food literacy, creates a rare opportunity to build a coordinated, region-wide approach. By working together, local partners can ensure these investments improve both access and learning, support universal school food provision, and expand shared infrastructure that also serves community food education. This momentum is already visible across the region, where interest in food learning is growing in libraries, recreation centres, community gardens, and greenhouses; spaces that offer cooking programs, growing opportunities, cultural food events, and intergenerational learning that rebuild lost skills and foster connection.

Together, a coordinated school food system and vibrant community food education opportunities can help shape a healthier, more equitable, and food literate region where every resident has the skills, confidence, and access to eat well for life.

Current Community Strengths

- Established school nutrition programs across the region, supported by Eat Well to Excel and community partners, providing daily food access to students and reducing barriers to learning.
- Active community delivery partners, that support school food programs through food sourcing, coordination, and complementary community-based supports.






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- Growing investment in food literacy and skills, reflected in classroom gardens, Lakehead University’s Farm Lab, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit’s You’re the Chef program, post-secondary courses, and community-led food education initiatives.
- Community enthusiasm for food learning, reflected in growing participation in cooking, growing, and cultural food programs offered by libraries, recreation departments, and cultural organizations.
- Dedicated federal funding through the National School Food Program and clear food literacy expectations in the Ontario Curriculum provide a strong policy foundation for local coordination.

Strategic Pathways

Pathways & Priorities	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
3.1 Strengthen and coordinate student nutrition programs regionally to improve consistency, dignity, and equity	Build coordination across schools and communities so programs are more consistent between schools, reduce stigma, and can respond to increasing demand with adequate staffing and support.	School boards, Eat Well to Excel, School Fuel and other school food providers, SMDHU, County, families and caregivers, community partners.
3.2 Improve school food infrastructure and shared use solutions (kitchens, storage, refrigeration, distribution)	Identify gaps that limit what schools can provide and pursue practical infrastructure solutions, including shared approaches where appropriate.	School boards, municipalities, funders, Ministry of Education, community partners, facilities managers.
3.3 Expand curriculum linked food literacy and experiential food learning (school + community)	Increase consistent access to practical skills (budgeting, shopping, cooking, growing) that do not depend on family resources or optional programming, and strengthen connections to food, culture, and stewardship.	Educators, libraries, community organizations, public health, post-secondary partners, youth programs.
3.4 Strengthen community food education hubs and build delivery capacity through post-secondary training, placements, and applied research	Treat gardens, teaching kitchens, greenhouses, libraries, and community spaces as learning hubs, supported by training pathways, placements, and applied research that helps scale what works.	Post-secondary education partners, libraries, municipalities, community organizations, Indigenous partners

Connection to Guiding Priorities

Priority	Connection
 Equity	Ensures that all students, have access to nutritious food and food learning opportunities. Builds dignity into food provision and creates equitable access to the skills and spaces that foster lifelong health.
 Policy	Aligns with federal and provincial directions on school food and food literacy. Strengthens local coordination among municipalities, school boards, and community partners to make the most of upcoming School Food Program investments.
 Indigenous Food Sovereignty	Honours Indigenous foodways and land-based learning as rights based knowledge systems, creating space for Indigenous education.
 Culture & Food Literacy	Food literacy supports health, learning, and well-being, while honouring diverse cultural food traditions. Schools and community spaces play a critical role in rebuilding food skills lost across generations.
 Climate & Environment	Builds climate awareness through food literacy, helping students and residents understand how food systems affect the environment and how sustainable changes can reduce impact. Encourages stewardship through growing, composting, and climate sensitive practices that build community resilience.

Sample Indicators

- Number and percentage of schools with Student Nutrition Programs.
- Number of schools and community sites with kitchens, gardens, or other food learning spaces.
- Percentage of school food sourced locally or regionally.
- Number of educators trained or supported in delivering food literacy programming.
- Participation in community-based food learning, including workshops, garden programs, and cooking classes.
- Participation of youth in culinary or agriculture-focused programs, including within K-12 school programs and post-secondary initiatives

SDG Alignment:

This pillar contributes to the following SDGs:

- **SDG 2: Zero Hunger** - by supporting universal, dignified access to nutritious food for students.
- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being** - by improving diet quality and long-term health outcomes through food literacy.

- **SDG 4: Quality Education** - by embedding experiential, food-based learning in schools and communities.
- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** - by reducing stigma and ensuring consistent access to food and learning opportunities.
- **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** - by building food skills that support sustainable choices.
- **SDG 13: Climate Action** - by linking food education to environmental stewardship and climate resilience.

Pillar: Food Access

Where We Want to Be

Everyone in Orillia and the surrounding area can access fresh, affordable, culturally meaningful food within their own communities, including traditional foods and opportunities to produce, harvest or gather local food. Food spaces, including markets, gardens, or emergency food programs are welcoming, connected, and reflective of local needs.

Why This Pillar Matters

Access to nutritious, affordable food is a clear indicator of health and equity in a community, consistent with the Public Health Agency of Canada's recognition of food access as a key social determinant of health. Across the region, residents described significant differences in how easily people can find, afford, and choose nutritious, locally available food. For some, distance and transportation barriers make nutritious food difficult to access. For many others, rising food costs relative to income are the primary obstacle. Some Indigenous residents rely on traditional foods that are shaped by access to land, water, and species protection, underscoring the importance of stewardship and Indigenous food sovereignty.

Access also needs to be culturally meaningful. Newcomers and culturally diverse communities contribute significantly to the local food system as workers, entrepreneurs, growers, and community members, while sometimes facing added barriers and limited availability of culturally meaningful foods. Improving cultural food access supports dignity, health, and inclusion, and strengthens community resilience.

In smaller towns and rural areas, grocery options can be limited, and many residents rely on periodic trips into Orillia or on emergency food programs to fill gaps. While some neighbourhoods have good access to gardens, markets, grocery stores, and food programs, others, particularly rural areas, face fewer options and higher barriers to access. Community organizations echoed these concerns, noting that seasonal programs and short funding cycles can make food access inconsistent over the year.

Youth highlighted how transportation, cost, and limited local options shape their daily food choices. Access to affordable, welcoming food spaces influences not only diet quality, but also independence, social connection, and a sense of belonging within their communities.

Together, these gaps point to a need for coordinated, year-round approaches that make local food more available, accessible, and affordable. Improving food access strengthens local economies, supports farmers, and builds community connection. There is growing recognition that municipalities and regions have a role to play by embedding food access into planning and

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by treating food infrastructure as essential community infrastructure. Recent disruptions to supply chains have further highlighted the importance of food system resilience and the need for coordinated planning to ensure communities can continue to access food during emergencies and extreme events.






Current Community Strengths

- Community gardens in some areas, and partnerships between emergency food providers, public health, and local growers.
- Municipal departments increasingly recognize food as part of community safety and well-being planning.
- Growing public awareness of local food and producers, supported by active farmers' markets and interest/demand in smaller food businesses and retailers.

Strategic Pathways

Pathways & Priorities	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
4.1 Embed food access into municipal and regional planning to reduce barriers	Integrate food access into land use, transportation, recreation, and community well-being planning so access improves across urban and rural areas and reflects real constraints (cost, time, routines, transportation).	Municipal planning and transportation staff, County partners, public health, libraries, community organizations.
4.2 Leverage public spaces as food access and food learning hubs	Use libraries, community centres, gardens, and greenhouses as welcoming places for food programming, skill building, markets/pop-ups, culturally diverse food programming and community connection.	Municipal recreation/facilities, libraries, garden groups, community organizations, volunteers, cultural groups.
4.3 Strengthen emergency food resilience planning for climate and supply disruptions	Plan for storms, outages, and disruptions so roles, communications, and food distribution pathways are clear and coordinated when emergencies happen.	Municipal emergency management, Simcoe County Food Council, food access organizations, public health, community agencies, utilities partners.

Connection to Guiding Priorities

Priority	Connection
 Equity	Responds to community calls for fair, affordable access to food, particularly in rural and low-income areas, ensuring dignity and choice.
 Policy	Reflects policy recommendations to embed food access in land use, recreation, transportation and community planning frameworks.
 Indigenous Food Sovereignty	Recognizes that food access includes the right to culturally relevant and traditionally harvested foods and encourages planning that respects Indigenous land rights and foodlands.
 Culture & Food Literacy	Builds food spaces that honour cultural and Indigenous food traditions and supports community led approaches to culturally relevant food.
 Climate & Environment	Strengthens short supply chains that can reduce emissions, food waste, and build local resilience to climate related disruptions.

Sample Indicators

- % of population within walking distance of nutritious food retail.
- Transit access to food (routes to grocery or fresh food sites).
- % of citizens who consume 5 or more fruit and vegetable servings per day.
- # of unique individuals served monthly at food banks or food support programs.
- Participation Good Food Box programs
- # and total dimensions of community gardens

SDG Alignment

This pillar contributes to the following SDGs:

- **SDG 2: Zero Hunger** — by improving physical, economic, and social access to nutritious food.
- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being** — by strengthening food environments that support more nutritious choices.
- **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** — by integrating food access into land-use planning, transportation, and community infrastructure.
- **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** — by supporting local food access and reducing reliance on long supply chains.

Pillar: Household Food Insecurity

Where We Want to Be

Everyone in Orillia and the surrounding area has the income, stability, and opportunity to consistently meet their food needs with dignity. No one has to choose between paying rent, heating their home, or putting food on the table. Ending household food insecurity requires coordinated local action and policy change that address poverty, income, and affordable living.

Why This Pillar Matters

Household food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, occurring when people cannot afford enough food for a healthy, active life. It is not the result of personal choices, skills, or behaviours; rather, it reflects the cumulative impact of low income, rising housing and living costs, and social systems that leave many residents behind. Indigenous food insecurity is shaped by disrupted access to land, harvesting sites, and traditional food systems. Colonial policies have contributed to higher food insecurity rates among Indigenous Peoples, and any responses must include self-determined approaches, in addition to income supports.

Household food insecurity is distinct from community food security, which describes the broader conditions, including local food systems, infrastructure, and equitable access, that enable all residents to meet their food needs. While both matter, the actions in this pillar focus primarily on household-level food insecurity. Addressing it meaningfully requires more than local coordination; it requires sustained action from provincial and federal governments on income adequacy, housing affordability, and social supports.

Local residents and organizations have repeatedly emphasized that household food insecurity is not about food shortages, but about affordability. Many working adults, older adults, and families are struggling to cover basic expenses as rents and grocery prices rise faster than wages or benefits.

Across the region, food banks and community meal programs are seeing record demand, with more people turning to emergency supports each month. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and leading food insecurity researchers agree: income-based policies such as livable wages, stronger income supports, and affordable housing are the most effective and proven ways to reduce household food insecurity (Idzerda et al., 2024; Idzerda et al., 2025). While charitable food programs play a critical short-term role in meeting immediate need, they cannot address the underlying causes of poverty.

In September 2025, the City of Orillia formally declared a Household Food Insecurity Emergency, recognizing food insecurity as a public health and policy crisis. The declaration called for coordinated action across all levels of government. The County of Simcoe responded by confirming its alignment with strategies to reduce household food insecurity, demonstrating regional leadership and commitment to coordinated solutions.

Municipal and community partners also play a vital role by coordinating supports, improving access to benefits, and advocating for systems change. Aligning the OAFS with the Orillia Poverty Reduction Implementation Plan and Simcoe County's Poverty Reduction and Food Security priorities ensures that food insecurity is addressed collaboratively across policy, planning, and service systems. While local partners can coordinate supports and reduce barriers, the underlying causes of household food insecurity - inadequate incomes, unaffordable

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housing, and gaps in social supports, require sustained action from provincial and federal governments. The role of this strategy is to advocate, align, and coordinate at the local level while calling on higher orders of government to act.

Food insecurity has immediate impacts on children and youth, affecting physical health, mental wellbeing, learning, and long-term outcomes. Youth shared concerns about the stress household food insecurity places on families and the sense of unfairness created when basic needs are not met, underscoring the importance of addressing underlying causes rather than relying on emergency responses alone.

While household food insecurity is driven by structural factors such as income adequacy, housing costs, and social policy, local governments and community partners still play a critical role in shaping conditions that influence affordability, dignity, and access. Policies related to procurement, employment standards, land use, and community infrastructure can support household stability, complement poverty reduction efforts, and strengthen the effectiveness of broader advocacy. The OAFS emphasizes both upstream advocacy and locally actionable levers as necessary and reinforcing approaches.

Current Community Strengths

- The City of Orillia’s 2025 declaration of a Household Food Insecurity Emergency brought regional attention to the issue and positioned the municipality as a leader in treating household food insecurity as a priority.
- The County of Simcoe’s response and stated alignment with strategies to reduce household food insecurity demonstrate a shared commitment across municipal levels.
- Good collaboration among emergency food providers, social service agencies, and public health partners.
- Shared and growing understanding across organizations that household food insecurity is an income and policy issue.
- Alignment with the Orillia Poverty Reduction Implementation Plan and the County Food Security Framework.
- Local champions, including health and social service leaders, advocating for systems-level change.






Strategic Pathways

Pathways & Priorities	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
5.1 Advance income and housing policy solutions that address the drivers of household food insecurity	Advocate and align around policy solutions that increase household incomes and reduce cost pressures (housing, affordability), reinforcing that food insecurity is not a food shortage issue.	Municipal councils, County of Simcoe, SMDHU, poverty reduction networks, MPs/MPPs, community organizations, businesses (as partners in local prosperity).

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Pathways & Priorities	What It Looks Like in Practice	Potential Partners / Sectors
5.2 Align household food insecurity reduction with poverty reduction, housing, and community wellbeing planning across the region	Connect local household food insecurity work to existing strategies and planning tables so efforts reinforce each other, reduce duplication, and stay upstream.	Poverty reduction working group(s), municipal and County staff, Community Safety and Well-Being partners, community agencies, Simcoe County Food Council working groups.
5.3 Increase income access through tax filing, benefits navigation, and low barrier supports	Expand awareness and access to income supports (tax filing, benefit navigation) that put money back into households and can support eligibility for programs such as housing supports.	Libraries, community tax clinics, community organizations, County services, financial counselling/support programs.

Connection to Guiding Priorities

Priority	Connection
 Equity	Centres the voices and experiences of people most affected by household food insecurity. Promotes dignity, fair income, and inclusion across all poverty reduction efforts.
 Policy	Calls on municipalities and partners to advocate for income adequacy, affordable housing, and fair wages, while engaging the public to “donate and advocate” for systemic change.
 Indigenous Food Sovereignty	Affirms that Indigenous food insecurity stems from disrupted land access and colonial systems, and that addressing it requires supporting Indigenous led, rights based approaches to food sovereignty, guided by community invitation.
 Culture & Food Literacy	Supports dignity and choice by recognizing that food security includes culturally meaningful foods, and the ability to prepare meals that reflect identity and preferences.
 Climate & Environment	Connects affordability and resilience by promoting local food systems that reduce emissions, support sustainable livelihoods, and strengthen community self-reliance. People living in poverty are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Sample Indicators

- % of households experiencing moderate or severe household food insecurity (Canadian Income Survey – adopted the HFI module)
- Proportion of households spending more than 30% of income on housing (linking food and housing affordability).
- Cost of a nutritious food basket
- % of population below the poverty line / Market Basket Measure
- Engagement in income, housing, and poverty reduction policy initiatives, including local or regional advocacy
- Living wage rates/# of certified living wage employers

SDG Alignment

This pillar advances the following United Nations SDGs:

- **SDG 1: No Poverty** — by addressing income adequacy, affordability, and cost of- living pressures that drive household food insecurity.
- **SDG 2: Zero Hunger** — by focusing on equitable access to sufficient, nutritious food and reducing household food insecurity.
- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being** — by recognizing food security as foundational to physical and mental health.
- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** — by centring dignity, equity, and upstream policy solutions for populations most affected by household food insecurity.

Implementation and Resourcing: From Strategy to Action

Implementation Planning: From Strategy to Action

Overview

The OAFS represents a coordinated next phase of an ongoing community-wide effort to strengthen the local food system. Developing the Strategic Framework is an important milestone, but the real work lies in bringing it to life. This section outlines the approach that will guide implementation, including how partners can be engaged, how action plans will be developed collaboratively, and how the work will be organized across phases.

Implementation will not happen all at once, nor will it rest with any single organization. Instead, it is intentionally designed to reflect the nature of the food system itself: dynamic, interconnected, and shaped by changing conditions, relationships, and opportunities. The approach set out here provides a clear structure and sequence for action, while allowing implementation to adapt as partners engage, capacity grows, and priorities evolve.

Within this framework, The Sharing Place Food Centre will continue to play a leadership and coordination role in supporting and enabling partner-led engagement, alignment, and

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implementation, in collaboration with governance tables, research partners, and food system partners.

Many food system actions deliver multiple benefits simultaneously. Strengthening local supply chains can improve food access while reducing vulnerability to climate related disruptions. Reducing food loss and waste can lower household and system costs while also cutting emissions. Supporting regenerative and stewardship focused production practices can enhance soil health, farm viability, and climate resilience at the same time. Recognizing and prioritizing these co-benefits helps maximize the impact of collective action across pillars.

A Phased Approach to Implementation

Implementation of the OAFS is organized into three broad phases. The boundaries between phases are flexible and will be shaped by partner capacity, funding opportunities, and emerging priorities.

Phase	Focus	Key Activities
Phase 1: Engagement and Action Planning	Building relationships and developing collaborative action plans with community partners	Collaborative reviews with partners; action plan development; food system coordination and matchmaking
Phase 2: Coordination and Governance	Strengthening coordination structures and formalizing roles across the food system	Determining governance model; supporting working groups; aligning with existing plans and strategies
Phase 3: Monitoring and Evaluation	Monitoring progress and learning from implementation	Food System Dashboard development; indicator selection and reporting

Phase 1: Collaborative Reviews and Action Planning

A central feature of early implementation will be a collaborative review and engagement process. This structured but flexible approach brings community partners into focused conversations to explore how their work intersects with the food system, build shared understanding, and develop practical action plans and identify shared measures of progress. These conversations form the foundation for coordinated action across the local food system.

Through the collaborative review process, partners will be invited to help identify where leadership, coordination, or advocacy is already emerging, and where additional support or alignment could accelerate progress. These roles will reflect capacity, mandate, and readiness rather than fixed obligations.

This process is grounded in a recognition that food systems planning is not yet well understood across all sectors and organizations. These conversations are designed to function both as a coordination tool and a shared learning opportunity, helping partners better understand where their work already connects to the food system and where new collaboration is possible. While initial conversations may vary by sector or readiness, Phase 1 engagement is intended to extend across the full range of OAFS partners over time.

How the collaborative review process will work:

- Engagement will be initiated with partners across the region through focused, partner-by-partner conversations.
- These conversations will explore how existing programs, policies, decisions, and investments align with the OAFS pillars and pathways.
- Engagement will be sequenced and scaled based on partner readiness, capacity, and opportunity. Indicator development will be integrated throughout, with measures identified collaboratively as partnerships deepen and priorities are confirmed.
- The Sharing Place Food Centre will serve as the coordinating organization for this engagement process, convening conversations and supporting partners to identify opportunities for collaboration and develop action plans that are realistic and capacity appropriate.

What these conversations are intended to do:

- Create the conditions for strategic pathways to come to life by connecting the right people, priorities, and resources.
- Act as a matchmaker between groups, organizations, and individuals working on complementary goals, reducing duplication and strengthening collective impact.
- Build food system literacy across partner organizations, supporting a shared understanding of how individual decisions shape food system outcomes.
- Develop collaborative action plans that are practical, realistic, and grounded in existing capacity, while identifying where new partnerships, funding, or coordination could add value.

This process is intentionally relational and iterative. It is not about assigning tasks or creating new obligations, it is about building a shared understanding of the food system and finding practical, collaborative ways to move the strategy forward together.

Phase 2: Governance and Coordination

The OAFS recognizes that a clear governance structure is essential for sustained, accountable implementation. The details of that structure will be designed in Phase 2, in consultation with partners, and will build on the relationships and learning from Phase 1.

Under the current implementation model:

- The Sharing Place Food Centre will continue to provide leadership and coordination capacity for the Strategy, including coordinating the collaborative review and action planning process, supporting time limited working groups or action tables, and helping to align partners and resources to advance priority actions.
- The OFASWG will serve as the primary governance table during the early implementation, within its mandate as a City of Orillia working group focused on strengthening our local food system.
- Implementation of the broader, regional dimensions of the OAFS, including engagement with community partners, regional organizations, and area municipalities, will require coordination capacity that reflects the full geographic and sectoral scope of the strategy. How this capacity is resourced and structured will be explored through Phase 2.

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- Pillar specific working groups or action tables may be established to advance focused areas of work, bringing together the partners best positioned to move specific pathways forward.
- Implementation is designed to complement countywide food system work, including existing priorities and initiatives led by the County of Simcoe. Ongoing collaboration with the Simcoe County Food Council will support shared learning, coordination between local and county priorities, and collaboration on monitoring and reporting where appropriate.

Phase 3: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring progress is essential for learning, accountability, and ensuring the strategy remains responsive to evolving community needs over time. A Food System Dashboard will be developed as a public facing tool to monitor a focused set of indicators aligned with the OAFS pillars and guiding priorities.

Dashboard development is planned as a dedicated phase of work, undertaken in collaboration with academic research and other partners. This approach ensures that indicators are feasible, data sources are reliable, and reporting is consistent and meaningful over time. Food System Dashboards in other Ontario regions have helped strengthen shared understanding, support evidence informed decision making, and provide a common reference point for partners working toward collective goals.

The dashboard will support:

- Regular progress updates for partners and the public
- Informed decision making about where to focus effort and resources
- Transparency and accountability across the food system
- Ongoing monitoring of emerging trends and community needs to support timely adjustments to priorities and actions

Resourcing and Funding Alignment

Implementation of the OAFS will require sustained investment in coordination, partnership, and capacity building. The Strategy itself does not constitute approval of funding or staffing. Any actions requiring organizational or municipal resources will be brought forward through future reports and decision making processes.

The OAFS does, however, strengthen the region's ability to attract and align external funding by demonstrating:

- A clear, community driven strategic framework
- Cross-sector collaboration and shared priorities
- Governance and coordination capacity
- A commitment to monitoring and accountability

As implementation advances, partners will use the OAFS to align grant applications with shared priorities, leverage municipal, county, provincial, federal, and philanthropic funding opportunities, and explore options for shared or hosted coordination capacity.

Conclusion

The OAFS represents something special: a community that looked at its food system, asked tough questions, and committed to working together toward something better. The five pillars, strategic pathways and guiding priorities in this framework did not emerge from a narrow perspective. They were shaped by farmers and food entrepreneurs, educators and students, Indigenous knowledge holders, public health professionals, municipal staff, community organizations, and residents who shared their experiences to envision a stronger local food system.

That engagement is both the foundation and the promise of this strategy. Food systems are complex precisely because food touches everything: health, land, economy, culture, climate, and community connection. No single organization, municipality, or sector can advance this work alone. The OAFS was designed with this reality in mind, and its implementation will be guided by the same understanding.

The strategic pathways identified in this framework are a set of shared priorities that create the conditions for action, alignment, and collaboration across the region. The real work of implementation will unfold through relationships; and through conversations among partners who have not yet sat at the same table, through collaboratively developed action plans, and through the steady, ongoing effort to build a food system that works for everyone.

Early implementation is already emerging and will grow as relationships deepen and the strategy progresses into its next phases. Governance structures will be strengthened and refined over time. Progress will be tracked, shared publicly, and used to adapt and improve the work as it evolves.

Food sits at the heart of how communities thrive, how economies grow, how cultures are expressed, and how resilience is built. In Orillia and the surrounding area, the groundwork has been laid. The partnerships are forming and the priorities are clear. What this strategy asks of all of us, municipalities, organizations, institutions, producers, and residents, is to stay at the table, keep the conversation going, and take the next steps together.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Policy and Planning Alignment

The Orillia & Area Food Strategy aligns with a range of municipal, regional, provincial, and emerging federal policy frameworks that guide community development, well-being, and sustainability. It also recognizes the Chippewas of Rama First Nation as a rights-holding government with distinct governance, planning priorities, and protocols. Where appropriate, the alignments below describe areas of shared interest, collaboration, and mutual benefit related to food systems, land stewardship, culture, economic development, and community well-being.

These alignments demonstrate how the Food Strategy builds on and supports current planning and policy directions across the region, while clarifying where food system priorities intersect with existing responsibilities, assets, and opportunities.

A. Municipal and Regional Plans

1. Community Safety and Well-Being Plans (CSWB)

Food connection: Food access and affordability are widely recognized as determinants of wellbeing, inclusion, and community resilience.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy supports community safety and wellbeing priorities by addressing food insecurity, improving equitable access to food, and building partnerships that strengthen local resilience, social connection, and belonging. The Strategy also supports coordinated approaches that reduce duplication and improve the effectiveness of services and community supports.

2. Official Plans and Land Use Policies

Food connection: Official Plans and land use policies influence where food can be produced, sold, shared, and supported. They shape farmland protection, urban form, transportation patterns, and the location of community infrastructure.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy complements land use planning by supporting policies that protect farmland, enable food production in appropriate settings, improve food access through complete communities, and integrate food system infrastructure into community design. The Strategy also recognizes that land and water decisions can affect Indigenous foodlands and traditional food sources, requiring respectful engagement consistent with Indigenous rights and protocols.

3. Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plans and Public Space Planning

Food connection: Parks, recreation, and culture planning commonly emphasize active, inclusive, and community-connected spaces. Many plans recognize opportunities for community gardens, edible landscaping, outdoor learning, and cultural programming in public spaces.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy advances these goals by promoting community gardens, food-based cultural events, edible landscapes, and outdoor and land-based learning as tools for health, inclusion, and community connection. These areas of focus also align with shared regional interests in culture, land stewardship, and community well-being, including opportunities for partnership and collaboration with the Chippewas of Rama First Nation where priorities align and engagement is guided by Rama First Nation protocols.

4. Poverty Reduction Strategies and Implementation Plans

Food connection: Poverty and food insecurity are deeply interconnected. Poverty reduction strategies that address income, housing, and social supports also shape people's ability to access adequate, nutritious food consistently.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy reinforces poverty reduction priorities by centering equity and access in food system planning, supporting programs and partnerships that address the drivers of food insecurity, and connecting food system actors with broader social support networks. The Strategy is designed to complement, not duplicate, existing poverty reduction efforts, and to strengthen the food-specific dimensions of community well-being.

5. Climate Action and Sustainability Plans

Food connection: Food systems contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, while also offering strong opportunities for climate solutions through local production, waste reduction, circular economies, and sustainable practices.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy supports climate goals by promoting regenerative and climate-resilient production practices, strengthening local supply chains, supporting low-carbon food infrastructure, and reducing food loss and waste. These priorities align with broader stewardship approaches and climate resilience efforts across the region, including Indigenous approaches to land and water-based stewardship where food, climate, and ecological priorities intersect.

6. Waste Reduction, Resource Recovery, and Circular Economy Plans

Food connection: Food systems intersect with waste reduction through food loss and waste prevention, organics management, composting, and circular economy approaches that reconnect food consumption, production, and environmental stewardship.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy aligns with municipal and county-level waste reduction and resource recovery plans by applying a food systems lens to shared priorities related to food waste prevention, organics diversion, and climate mitigation. This alignment strengthens the impact of existing waste reduction efforts by situating them within broader food system goals related to food insecurity, climate resilience, soil health, and community wellbeing.

7. Economic Development Strategies and Community Improvement Plans (CIPs)

Food connection: Economic development strategies often identify opportunities in agri-food, culinary and place-based tourism, small business development, workforce development, and local procurement.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy supports these goals by strengthening local food entrepreneurship, value-added processing, market readiness, and procurement initiatives that keep food dollars circulating locally and build resilient value chains. These priorities also intersect with regional economic development interests related to food, land stewardship, and tourism, creating opportunities for partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous food businesses and communities where aligned and mutually beneficial.

8. Regional and County-Level Strategies and Frameworks

Food connection: Regional and county-level strategies influence food security, housing and poverty reduction, social services coordination, economic development, and community well-being -- all of which intersect directly with local food systems.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy amplifies regional goals by supporting coordination across sectors, strengthening local and regional food access, improving resilience, and aligning work already underway in communities. The Strategy is designed to complement and connect existing efforts rather than duplicate them, and to support shared monitoring and accountability over time.

B. Indigenous Relations, Reconciliation, and Rights-Based Frameworks

Food connection: Food sovereignty and cultural foodways are central to Indigenous well-being, identity, and reconciliation. Indigenous food systems are land, water, and relationship-based and are grounded in governance practices that long predate municipal and colonial systems. The Chippewas of Rama First Nation are a rights-holding government with distinct governance structures, planning priorities, and protocols that must be respected in all areas of engagement.

Alignment rationale: The Strategy supports reconciliation by affirming Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and by recognizing that Indigenous knowledge systems, protocols, and governance must guide engagement and decision-making where food system actions intersect with Indigenous foodlands and traditional food sources. The Strategy does not define Indigenous food systems or speak on behalf of Indigenous communities, and it emphasizes partnership and co-governance when invited and where capacity exists.

C. Provincial Policy Direction

9. Ontario's Local Food Act, 2013

Food connection: Ontario's *Local Food Act, 2013* recognizes the importance of strong local and regional food systems in supporting economic development, community wellbeing, and resilient food economies across the province. The Act encourages collaboration among public sector organizations, including municipalities, to strengthen local food systems and expand market opportunities for Ontario food.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy aligns with the *Local Food Act* by supporting coordinated local action, partnerships, and planning approaches that strengthen local food economies, increase access to local food, and build long-term system resilience. The Strategy provides a municipal and regional framework through which provincial food system objectives can be advanced in locally appropriate ways.

10. Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS, 2024)

Food connection: The *Provincial Planning Statement, 2024*, issued under the *Planning Act* and in effect since October 20, 2024, is Ontario's consolidated province-wide land use planning policy framework. All municipal planning decisions must be consistent with the PPS, 2024. The Statement includes policies that protect prime agricultural areas and specialty crop areas, support agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses, and encourage land use patterns that support healthy, liveable communities - including access to food retail and community food infrastructure.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy is consistent with the PPS, 2024 by supporting land use decisions and community planning approaches that protect farmland, enable food production in appropriate settings, and integrate food system infrastructure into community design. The Strategy reinforces the PPS, 2024's vision for complete communities where access to food, social services, and public space supports the long-term well-being of residents.

11. Grow Ontario: A Provincial Agri-Food Strategy (2022)

Food connection: *Grow Ontario* is the province's ten-year agri-food strategy, designed to strengthen the agri-food sector, support economic growth, and ensure an efficient, reliable, and responsive food supply for Ontarians. Its targets include increasing the production and consumption of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30 per cent by 2032, and growing total agri-food sector employment by 10 per cent.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy aligns with *Grow Ontario* by supporting local food entrepreneurship, food production, supply chain development, and workforce pathways in the agri-food sector. The Strategy's focus on food production, food infrastructure, and the local food economy reflects the same priorities at a community and regional scale, and helps position Orillia-area producers and food businesses to benefit from provincial investments and programs as they are rolled out.

12. Greenbelt Plan - Provincial Context

Food connection: The *Greenbelt Plan* protects over 800,000 hectares of agricultural lands, specialty crop areas, and ecologically significant natural systems in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe. While the Orillia and area region fall outside the current Greenbelt boundary, the Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition and regional partners have identified areas of Simcoe County, including the Oro Moraine, the Lake Simcoe watershed, the Nottawasaga River Watershed, and the Minesing Wetlands, as priority areas for potential Greenbelt expansion, recognizing their importance for water security, farmland protection, and long-term food production capacity.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy reflects the same values of farmland stewardship, ecological integrity, and long-term food production capacity that the Greenbelt Plan represents. As discussions about potential expansion of the Greenbelt into Simcoe County continue, the OAFS provides a locally grounded framework that reinforces the importance of protecting agricultural lands and natural systems that support food production in the Orillia and area food shed.

D. Federal Policy Direction

13. National Food Security Strategy (Announced January 2026)

Food connection: In January 2026, the Government of Canada announced its intention to develop a National Food Security Strategy, alongside new investments in food security, local food infrastructure, and supply chain resilience. This emerging policy direction reflects growing federal recognition of the role local and regional food systems play in food access, affordability, and resilience.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy aligns with this emerging federal direction by articulating shared priorities, identifying partnership opportunities, and strengthening local coordination across food system actors. By establishing a clear, community-informed framework, the Strategy helps position Orillia and the surrounding region to engage constructively with future federal initiatives as they emerge.

14. Draft Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, 2026-2029

Food connection: Canada's draft *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy 2026-2029* sets out the federal government's goals for improving quality of life through sustainable development. Two goals are directly relevant to food systems: Goal 1.3 (Reduce Poverty in Canada), which addresses food security, affordability, and access; and Goal 2.2 (Strengthen the Resilience and Sustainability of Canadian Agriculture), which supports long-term agricultural viability, supply chain resilience, and sustainable food production.

Alignment rationale: The Orillia & Area Food Strategy aligns with both goals of the draft FSDS 2026-2029. The Strategy's household food security priorities, equity-centered access work, and poverty reduction partnerships directly support the direction of Goal 1.3. Its food production, local food economy, and sustainable agriculture priorities align with Goal 2.2. As the federal strategy moves toward finalization, the OAFS provides a locally grounded framework that reflects and supports these national directions.

Appendix B: Community Engagement Summaries

The summaries in this appendix were shared with the community following each engagement activity as part of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy development process. They are presented here in chronological order to reflect the arc of engagement that shaped the strategy. Summaries are reproduced as originally released.

Contents

Summary	Date
What We Heard at the Food Strategy Open House	June 2025
Summer 2025 Restaurant Campaign: Our Food, Our Future	Summer 2025
Food Bank Client Voices: Postcard Engagement	June 2025
What We Heard at Orillia's Food Insecurity Emergency Declaration Event	September 2025
What We Heard: Food System Changemakers Session	November 2025
What We Heard: Food Producer & Food Business Working Session	January 2026
What We Heard: Let's Talk Food -School Food & Food Education	February 2026
What We Heard; Youth Food Futures	March 2026

1. What We Heard at the Food Strategy Open House

June 12, 2025

On June 12th, 2025, residents from across Orillia and the area came together to learn about our food system and share their perspectives on the future of our local food system. The comments, ideas, and insights collected across diverse groups -- residents, educators, farmers, entrepreneurs, and community organizations -- highlighted common priorities.

Food Access & Affordability: Transportation, price, and limited availability are major barriers. There is a strong desire for more accessible, affordable local food options.

Growing Local: Participants emphasized the need to protect farmland and find ways to make farmland more accessible to those who want to farm. Others called for year-round growing infrastructure and support for smaller-scale farmers and producers who want to be able to process and sell their products locally.

Education & Skills: The community wants to see more community food education -- hands-on workshops, Indigenous food teachings, and food skills programming that brings people together around growing and preparing local food.

Equity & Collaboration: Ensuring a seat at the table for all -- especially youth, Indigenous communities, and people with lived experience -- was named as essential. Ideas also included integrating food system work into broader planning strategies, like poverty reduction and community safety plans.

Action & Connection: People are ready for action. They want opportunities to connect, collaborate, and shape real change -- not another report sitting on a shelf.

We are deeply grateful for the voices and vision shared. This input is directly informing the development of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy.

2. Summer 2025 Restaurant Campaign: Our Food, Our Future

In the summer of 2025, The Sharing Place Food Centre partnered with locally owned restaurants across Orillia to run a three-week public awareness campaign. Participating restaurants displayed campaign posters and distributed billfold inserts with customer bills, directing residents and seasonal visitors to a community food survey and information about the food systems planning process. This campaign served as a point-of-contact engagement strategy, reaching community members in everyday dining settings and connecting them to the broader strategy development work underway. The campaign engaged the local food service sector as active partners in public education, reflecting the critical role restaurants play within the food system, from sourcing and preparation to community connection

3. Food Bank Client Voices: Postcard Engagement

The Sharing Place Food Centre | June 2025

Community members visiting The Sharing Place Food Centre were invited to share their experiences in their own words through a postcard activity connected to a broader provincial advocacy effort around food insecurity. Participants were asked to respond to the prompt: *"Many people in Ontario are facing a food emergency. How is this affecting you right now? What could the government do to help get people back on their feet?"*

Postcards were completed by individuals with direct, lived experience of food insecurity, including seniors on fixed pensions, people living with disabilities, single parents, individuals experiencing homelessness, and families with children. Responses are included here anonymously and with respect for the courage it takes to share these experiences.

What We Heard

Across all responses, participants described food insecurity not as an isolated problem, but as one piece of a much larger struggle to meet basic needs. Several consistent themes emerged:

- **The cost of living is the core issue.** Participants were clear that there is simply not enough money left over for food after paying for rent, utilities, and other basic expenses. Housing costs, inadequate income, and the rising price of everyday goods were named again and again as the real drivers of hunger in our community.
- **Grocery prices are out of reach.** The high cost of food at grocery stores was a central concern, with particular worry about being able to afford fresh fruits and vegetables for children. As one participant wrote: *"Struggling to keep fresh fruits and veggies for kids to have healthy options."*
- **Vulnerable people are bearing the heaviest burden.** Seniors living on fixed pensions, people receiving ODSP, and single parents navigating the intersection of childcare, precarious work, and limited income described situations with very little room to absorb any additional pressure. One participant wrote: *"I'm a senior and find on pension there is very little money to live on, food prices are high, cost of living very high."*
- **Food bank use is growing and widening.** Participants noted that more people are turning to the food bank, including people who previously managed on their own. As one

person put it: *"More and more are using the food bank. Even people who were able to afford food before."*

- **School food is a growing pressure point for families.** The difficulty of affording school lunches and nutritious food for children came up as a specific and practical concern for parents.
- **People are asking for structural change.** Participants consistently called for lower food and grocery prices, more affordable housing, stronger income supports, and accessible childcare. These responses reflect a community that understands the roots of food insecurity go well beyond food itself.

These voices are a reminder that food insecurity in Orillia and area is not a matter of individual circumstance, it is a community-wide challenge that requires a community-wide response. They directly informed the OAFS's emphasis on affordability, dignified access, and the importance of addressing the social and economic conditions that shape food security for everyone.

4. What We Heard at Orillia's Food Insecurity Emergency Declaration Event

September 18, 2025 | Orillia Public Library

On September 18th, 2025, residents from across Orillia and area met at the Orillia Public Library to learn about and discuss Orillia's recent declaration of a Food Insecurity Emergency. What we heard from community members at the meeting included:

Awareness & Dialogue: Residents said events like this help increase dialogue and awareness of solutions. The poverty puzzle presentation was praised for breaking down myths about who experiences poverty and food insecurity. Participants suggested it could be adapted for training, awareness campaigns, or advocacy (letters, petitions, postcards).

Income & Housing: Orillia's free and low-cost tax clinics processed approximately 1,500 returns in 2024, returning \$3.5 million to residents and helping people qualify for subsidized housing. Affordable housing wait times were reported as currently 10 to 15 years. Key message: putting more income into people's pockets is the strongest way to reduce poverty, improve opportunities, and support the local economy. Businesses should be engaged as partners.

Recreation & Inclusion: An idea was raised to add an option to donate toward subsidies when registering for recreation programs. Empower Simcoe distributes free recreation passes for facility use but not lessons. Participants suggested expanding program supports so children can access lessons, not just facilities.

Policy & Government Response: The question of whether the Province had responded to Orillia's emergency declaration was raised -- no response had been received at the time. Participants clarified that Council endorsed food insecurity as an emergency, but no formal State of Emergency was declared. Council's move to reduce transit rates was cited as a concrete example of action flowing from the declaration.

Business & Economic Development: Local economic prosperity was connected to reducing poverty, as more income means more local spending. A noted gap: Orillia no longer has an Economic Development Committee -- such a body could help foster business partnerships around poverty reduction. A community member shared that her employer will donate (with matching funds) to a local food organization because of awareness raised by the declaration.

Advocacy & Donations: The idea of 'when you donate, also advocate' was raised -- donations address urgent need, but systemic change requires income policy reform. Participants suggested including advocacy messages in Sharing Place and other food drive campaigns.

Food Production & Community Growing: A question was raised about whether Orillia could investigate establishing a community greenhouse. Additional concerns were noted about lack of supported land for farming, edible landscaping, and accessible fruit trees.

This community engagement and discussion will be used to support development of the local Poverty Reduction Strategy and the regional Orillia and Area Food Strategy.

5. What We Heard: Food System Changemakers Session

November 28, 2025 | Released December 2025

Thank you to everyone who joined the Food System Changemakers session on November 28th. This document summarizes the key themes heard through the group discussions, worksheets, and post-session evaluations. These insights will guide the next phase of community engagement and action planning shaping the Orillia & Area Food Strategy. Please reach out if you have any recommended changes to what is written.

1. People valued connection and collaboration

Participants consistently highlighted how meaningful it was to meet others who care about building a stronger, more sustainable food system. People appreciated:

- Meeting new collaborators
- Hearing diverse perspectives
- Feeling part of a collective effort

This reinforces that relationship-building is a core part of our strategy and a foundation for sustained community action.

2. People want more time on fewer topics

Several participants shared that the workshop covered a lot of ground in a short amount of time. Participants wanted:

- More time for deep discussion
- A focused agenda
- Prioritization tools

This feedback supports shifting to topic-specific sessions, where participants can explore issues in more depth and help identify concrete next steps.

3. Participants want tangible goals and next steps

There was strong appetite to move toward action. People expressed interest in:

- Trying out recommendations (e.g., testing ideas on farms or in community spaces)
- Developing small, achievable early wins
- Linking strategy ideas to funding opportunities

This supports the need for action-oriented working sessions where the community can co-design:

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- Recommendations and actions within focus areas
- Possible smaller 'quick-win' actions
- Clear roles and champions

6. Producers need to be more meaningfully included

Several comments emphasized the need for:

- More producer participation
- More tailored engagement for producers
- A stronger connection with farmers' markets
- Understanding of assets and infrastructure to inform recommendations

This supports planning a producer-centered session during the winter off-season.

5. Community gardens and food education reps are eager to act now

Participants involved in gardens, food skills programs, and youth programming expressed a readiness to:

- Support food literacy events and host workshops
- Connect community gardens to other food-related opportunities
- Participate in volunteer networks

This is a strong opportunity for early action on food literacy, community hubs, and public space activation.

6. People want support to stay engaged

Participants shared that continued involvement will be easier if they have:

- Regular communication or updates
- Opportunities to participate between meetings
- A way to stay connected with people they met
- Clarity on how the City of Orillia Food Access & Sustainability Working Group, the Simcoe County Food Council, and the Orillia & Area Food Strategy align

This signals a need for a simple, ongoing engagement structure such as:

- More cross-sector gatherings
- Topic-specific sessions to support Food Strategy development
- Continued use of a community mailing list for updates
- Clear 'how to get involved' pathways

7. The broader perspective provided by our guest presenters added value

People appreciated learning from Dr. Levkoe and Sarah Siska and understanding how other regions approached food systems work and how community-driven strategies can lead to meaningful change. This perspective helped situate our regional work in a larger movement and generated enthusiasm for local action.

Next Steps

Based on this feedback, we will be planning a series of winter sessions that focus on two areas:

1. Food Production & the Local Food Economy

2. School Food & Food Education/Literacy

Call for 2-3 Volunteers

We are looking for 2 to 3 individuals to help shape the next phase of engagement. We welcome anyone who is interested in supporting this work, especially people with:

- Experience in food production or agri-business
- Experience in school food or education

This group will help guide session design, ensure the right voices are at the table, and strengthen our outreach. We expect this role to be short-term and flexible.

Your participation and perspectives are helping shape a stronger and more sustainable food future for Orillia and area. We look forward to continuing this work with you.

6. What We Heard: Food Producer & Food Business Working Session

January 29, 2026

Thirty farmers, producers, restaurants and food businesses, municipal and government staff, public health professionals, nonprofits, and education partners participated in this working session. Several partners who were unable to attend provided written input prior to the session. The purpose was to identify strategy actions that support two pillar areas: (1) regional food infrastructure and local market access, and (2) inspiring and supporting the next generation of food producers.

The food shared during the session was prepared by local producers and food businesses -- delicious and a great reminder of the talent, care, and creativity across our region. Supporting these businesses is central to building a thriving local food economy.

Goal 1: Build Regional Food Infrastructure & Local Market Access

Strengthening Regional Food Infrastructure

- Clear demand for processing, storage, and certified kitchen access.
- Need for practical aggregation options for coordinating supply and delivery.
- Previous models showed that technology tools fail unless reliable buyers are in place.
- The closure of several small abattoirs means that livestock must travel long distances, highlighting a severe regional processing gap.

Improving Local Market Access

- Producers and restaurants stressed the need for reliable supply, fair pricing, and workable logistics.
- Farmers markets remain essential for direct sales and public education but face challenges with vendor mix, accessibility, and location.

Action Priorities for Goal 1

Short Term (0-12 months):

- Map existing infrastructure and gaps (processing, storage, aggregation).
- Pilot availability/surplus matching between producers and buyers.
- Strengthen communications and marketing about local producers.

Medium Term (1-3 years):

- Plan shared processing and storage infrastructure.
- Pilot aggregation models that reduce delivery burdens.
- Strengthen farmers markets (location, vendor mix, accessibility).

Long Term (3+ years):

- Develop permanent market or multi-use food infrastructure space.
- Advance policy and advocacy for right-sized regulations and small-scale processing.

Goal 2: Inspire and Support the Next Generation of Producers

Youth Need Hands-On Pathways

- Youth require direct exposure to growing, harvesting, and practical agriculture skills.
- The former Farm to Feed Cities program demonstrates what is possible -- and what is lost when liability and busing barriers prevent visits.
- SHSM (Specialist High Skills Major) agriculture programming, the Dairy Educator Program, and on-farm learning were highlighted as strong models for raising awareness with students.

Land Access Is the Defining Barrier

- Current policies prevent subdivision of large parcels, making viable 5 to 10 acre farms inaccessible for new entrants.
- Publicly owned farmland is typically leased to large operators, not small producers.

Mentorship, Skills, and Realistic Support

- New growers need mentorship, business skills, and realistic guidance about farm work and viability.
- Programs like Young Agrarians, 4-H, and on-farm internships remain critical pipelines.

Action Priorities for Goal 2

Short Term (0-12 months):

- Increase farm tours and K-12 experiential learning opportunities.
- Strengthen mentorship access and map existing mentor farms.
- Reduce insurance barriers for school visits and youth programs.

Medium Term (1-3 years):

- Expand SHSM agriculture pathways and youth employment programs.
- Provide shared infrastructure (processing, storage, certified kitchens) to lower startup costs for new producers.
- Build partnerships between farms, schools, and post-secondary institutions.

Long Term (3+ years):

- Implement land-access solutions (public land leases, land matching, land trusts, co-op models).
- Advocate for policy changes enabling smaller parcels, on-farm housing, and flexible zoning.
- Support long-term succession planning between established and emerging farmers.

Participant Voices

Producer: *"The farmers market is where we educate people that farmers grow food."*

Food business: *"Certified kitchen access is essential -- and expensive."*

Restaurant: *"Restaurants can raise awareness of local food, but logistics and consistency matter most."*

Agriculture sector: *"It's regulations, people, and money... the three stumbling blocks."*

Education partner: *"Authentic experiences help students see themselves in agriculture."*

Next Steps

- Share this summary with the community.
- Integrate these insights into the Orillia & Area Food Strategy.
- Continue engagement through the next consultation session on school food and food education on February 26, 2026.
- Prepare recommendations for municipal and regional partners, including shared infrastructure, next-generation farmer pathways, and policy opportunities.

Thank you to all who shared their insights, challenges, and ideas and to those who reviewed this information and engaged in helping to build momentum. This work is stronger because of you.

7. What We Heard: Let's Talk Food - School Food & Food Education

February 26, 2026 | Lakehead University, Orillia

On February 26, 2026, more than 50 people came together for a community conversation focused on school food and food education, bringing a wide range of perspectives from across the region. This session was hosted by the Orillia & Area Food Strategy, the Simcoe County Food Council, and Lakehead University. The session was designed as a space for listening, learning, and creating connections and potential partnerships. Participants were invited to help validate, refine, and strengthen areas of action that already have broad support and momentum.

Goals of the Session

The goals of the session were to:

- Bring together educators, community partners, food skills programs, and youth-serving organizations.
- Raise awareness of the areas of action our community is already aligned around.
- Validate and refine the ideas shaping the School Food & Food Education pillar of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy.
- Build and strengthen a regional network of partners working in school food and food learning through the Simcoe County Food Council (SCFC).

Who Participated

Participants represented a wide range of organizations, roles, perspectives, and experiences, including:

- Community food programs and food access organizations

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- Elementary and secondary educators, school administrators, and school council representatives
- Indigenous community members and partners
- Libraries, municipalities, and service organizations
- Post-secondary faculty, students, and researchers
- Public health professionals
- Volunteers, parents, students, and residents

What We Heard 1: Elementary & Secondary School Food & Food Learning

Stable and adequate funding is essential: Participants consistently shared that school food programs are under-resourced and often rely on short-term or patchwork funding. There was strong agreement that predictable, stable funding is critical to ensuring consistency, dignity, and quality. Participants noted that funding needs to reflect not only food costs, but also staffing, coordination, storage, and delivery.

School food infrastructure limits what is possible: Participants identified gaps in kitchen space, refrigeration, storage, and distribution capacity across schools. Differences between schools were seen as creating inequities in access to food and programming. There was interest in shared or coordinated infrastructure solutions, rather than expecting each school to solve these challenges independently.

Curriculum-linked food literacy matters: Hands-on, experiential food learning was strongly supported. Participants emphasized the importance of aligning food education with curriculum expectations, so educators have the tools and confidence to deliver it. Food literacy was widely described as a life skill that supports health, learning, culture, and long-term well-being.

Volunteer and staffing capacity is a pressure point: While volunteers play a vital role in student nutrition programs, participants raised concerns about burnout and over-reliance on unpaid labour. There was strong recognition that paid coordination roles, training, and staffing stability are essential to program quality and sustainability.

Additional themes: Participants also raised the importance of student voice, reducing stigma, improving communication with families, and ensuring more consistency across schools and regions. Many also expressed a desire to better understand how school nutrition programs work, where key challenges exist, and how community members and partners can meaningfully support and strengthen these programs.

What We Heard 2: Food-Based Learning in the Community

Strong interest in Indigenous foodways and land-based learning: Participants expressed a desire for learning rooted in Indigenous knowledge, foodways, and relationships to land. There was clear recognition that Indigenous leadership and guidance are essential, and that land-based and seasonal learning offers valuable opportunities for people of all ages.

Community food infrastructure supports learning and connection: Community gardens, teaching kitchens, greenhouses, and shared spaces were consistently identified as important assets. These spaces were seen not just as places to grow or prepare food, but as hubs for learning, connection, and intergenerational engagement.

Food literacy belongs in community programming: Participants highlighted opportunities to integrate food skills and food literacy into existing community programs. There was interest in

programming for all ages, culturally relevant approaches, and low-barrier, welcoming spaces that build confidence around food.

Additional themes: The need for better coordination, clearer communication about existing programs, and reduced duplication across organizations came up repeatedly.

What We Heard 3: Growing Post-secondary Leadership in Food Education & Training

Interest in expanded food-related learning opportunities: Participants expressed interest in more food-related courses and micro-credentials that respond to community needs and connect to careers in education, health, agriculture, and community development.

Experiential learning benefits students and communities: Field placements, co-ops, and experiential learning opportunities were seen as valuable for both students and host organizations. Participants emphasized the importance of coordination and support to make these opportunities accessible and meaningful.

Applied research grounded in community needs: There was interest in post-secondary institutions playing a stronger role as connectors and knowledge hubs. Participants highlighted opportunities for applied research, evaluation, and innovation that are grounded in real-world community needs and shared back in accessible ways.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Across all discussions, participants consistently emphasized:

- The importance of coordination and connection
- The need for stable funding and people capacity
- Strong appetite for hands-on, experiential learning
- Desire to reduce silos between schools, community organizations, and post-secondary institutions
- Interest in starting with realistic, achievable actions while keeping long-term system change in view

What the Mentimeter Word Cloud Told Us

Participants were invited to share input anonymously through Mentimeter during the session. Words appear larger based on how often they were shared by participants. The most prominent words reflected the essential role of school food and food education, highlighting themes such as nutrition, necessity, health, access, and equity, alongside words that reflected both opportunity and challenge.

What This Means for the Orillia & Area Food Strategy

The input from this session reinforces that school food and food education are areas of strong community alignment and momentum. Participants clearly see the value of coordinated action, shared learning, and building on what already exists. Emerging directions include:

Short-term (building connection & momentum):

- Strengthening connections between schools, community programs, and existing initiatives
- Sharing information and raising awareness of what is already happening
- Supporting small, achievable pilot projects where readiness exists
- Continuing to convene partners and expand the network
- Building people capacity through coordination, training, and staffing support

Medium-term (building capacity & delivery):

- Strengthening community and school food infrastructure
- Supporting curriculum-linked food literacy and experiential learning
- Deepening partnerships across sectors

Longer-term (system change & sustainability):

- Advancing stable funding models
- Supporting system-level coordination and policy alignment
- Embedding food education and food access as foundational to learning, health, and well-being

Community Partners Featured in the Session

- Clearwater Farm
- Coalition for Healthy School Food
- Farm Lab, Lakehead University
- Farm to Cafeteria Canada
- Food Is Science, Sustain Ontario
- Kids Pantry, Weekend Food for Kids, Pavlik Foundation
- Orillia Community Gardens
- Rooted in Ramara
- School Fuel, The Sharing Place Food Centre
- Simcoe County Food Council -- School Food Working Table
- You're the Chef, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

This conversation is part of a long-term commitment to strengthening school food and food education in our region. A summary of the session was shared publicly and will inform the next phase of development for the School Food & Food Education pillar of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy. Thank you to everyone who shared their time, experience, and ideas. This work is stronger because of you.

8. Youth Food Futures: What We Heard

March 11, 2026 | Teen Leadership Committee (TLC), Orillia Public Library

Purpose of this Engagement

Youth are active participants in the food system every day through school food, family food routines, transportation realities, part-time work, and increasing exposure to climate impacts. This session gathered youth perspectives as evidence to inform the Orillia & Area Food Strategy, with a focus on food access, food insecurity, school food, food skills and literacy, and climate. Engagement activities were designed to prompt reflection on youth lived experience with food and food messaging, and included facilitated discussion, a 'Would You Rather' activity, and written and visual input captured through worksheets, poster boards, and image recognition exercises.

1. Food Insecurity (Can't Afford Food)

"When you're hungry, you feel miserable. You can't focus, you get headaches, and your brain just doesn't work properly."

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Youth described food insecurity as stretching limited budgets through buying off-brand or sale items, purchasing lower-grade or imperfect food, eating less or skipping meals, and relying on free food programs. Food theft from grocery stores was also named as something some young people associate with food insecurity. Barriers identified were primarily money, with transportation also playing a role. Youth vision of a better future focused on better economic access to food and normalizing free food programs so using them does not feel stigmatizing.

Key insight: Youth framed food insecurity as both a material issue and a dignity issue, with clear impacts on wellbeing and learning.

2. Food Access (Getting Food)

"Healthy food is expensive, and when you're busy you grab what's quick, even if it's not what you want to be eating."

Youth described getting food mainly through family shopping, meals prepared at home, grocery stores, and occasional restaurant or fast-food purchases. Eating together with family was valued when schedules allowed. Barriers to access included cost, busy schedules, reliance on convenience foods due to time pressure, routine challenges, and travel cost barriers, especially for youth living outside of Orillia.

Key insight: Youth framed food access as shaped by affordability, time, routine, and transportation -- not just proximity.

3. Food Knowledge and Food Skills

"Learning how to shop and cook on a budget is something everyone needs. We barely get taught that."

Youth prioritized practical food skills such as basic cooking and baking, batch cooking, gardening, and learning how to shop and budget for food. They are learning these skills through school courses, family members, friends, YouTube and online videos, and programs such as cadets, scouts, or babysitting and staying-home-alone courses.

Key insight: Youth value everyday food skills, but learning opportunities are uneven and often depend on family resources or optional programming.

4. School Food

"It depends on what school you go to. Some schools have food every day and others barely have anything."

Youth described school food as a mix of breakfast or free food programs offered at limited times, first-come first-served access, and cafeterias that are expensive with long lines and limited nutritious options. Food programs are often located in specific rooms such as guidance offices or club spaces, limiting their sense of access. What is not working included inconsistent access between schools, long waits that cut into lunch or break time, unexpected cafeteria closures, and limited communication when changes occur. Youth ideas for better school food focused on more nutritious options, greater availability, free or lower-cost food, and lower prices overall. Youth strongly supported the concept of a universal meal program available to all students.

Key insight: Which school a student attends significantly affects food access.

5. Climate and Food

"When the power goes out after storms, food goes bad and there isn't much you can do about it."

Youth linked climate change to food through ice storms, extreme weather, power outages affecting food storage, and food shortages. Ideas to improve food for the planet included reducing pesticide use and learning more about the growing use of genetically modified foods.

Key insight: Youth understand climate impacts through lived experience rather than abstract concepts.

6. 'Would You Rather' Activity -- Youth Reflections

The 'Would You Rather' activity was used as a conversation starter rather than a binary choice exercise. Youth were asked to consider trade-offs between two positive options and discuss what mattered most to them in their current stage of life. Across the activity, youth expressed strong support for the following priorities:

- Free school lunch was seen as especially important due to early start times and busy mornings: "Lunch at school would help more than breakfast. Mornings are rushed and it's too early."
- Learning how to budget, shop, and cook was described as a critical life skill, particularly as youth begin to work, plan meals independently, and think about life living on their own.
- Access to a grocery store closer to home mattered most for youth living outside Orillia, where transportation costs, travel time, and limited transit options affect food access.
- Both sit-down spaces to eat with peers and grab-and-go options are valued, reflecting different needs depending on schedules, social connection, and time pressure.

Key insight: The activity highlighted how youth priorities are shaped by schedules, developmental stage, geography, and daily realities.

7. Food Recognition Activity -- Brands, Vegetables, and Food Messaging

As part of the session, youth participated in a visual recognition activity using two sets of images: locally grown vegetables and widely marketed food brand logos. When shown photos of vegetables known to grow well in the region (including rutabaga, Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, eggplant, Swiss chard, bok choy, black walnut, and plums), recognition varied widely among participants. In contrast, when shown logo images of major food brands (including fast food, beverage, and packaged food companies), recognition was consistently high across the group. This activity was not framed as a test, and differences in recognition were discussed openly and respectfully. Youth reflected on how food marketing, advertising, and brand exposure shape familiarity, often more strongly than education about whole foods, nutrition, or local food systems.

Key insight: Youth food awareness reflects the large-scale reach of ultra-processed food marketing, alongside limited and inconsistent exposure to nutrition education and local food knowledge. Addressing this imbalance will require rethinking the food messages and learning opportunities youth are exposed to, rather than placing responsibility on individual young people.

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Cross-Cutting Themes for the Food Strategy

Across all activities, youth consistently highlighted affordability as the dominant driver of food choices, time pressure as a major constraint, the importance of dignity and normalization in food programs, inconsistencies in school food access, a strong desire for practical food skills, and clear links between food, wellbeing, and learning. Youth input also highlighted the powerful role of food marketing and messaging in shaping awareness and familiarity, underscoring the need for stronger, more consistent exposure to whole foods, nutrition, and local food systems.

How This Input Is Used

Youth input gathered through discussion and participatory activities will help inform the development of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy, bringing youth perspectives and lived experience into the Strategy.

Appendix C: Survey Summary

Orillia & Area Food Strategy Community & Organization Survey Summary

This summary reflects input gathered through an ongoing community survey process that informed the development of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy. Responses were collected from individual residents and community members, as well as organizations working across the local food system, and were considered alongside insights from in-person consultations and advisory group engagement.

As of March 17, 2026, the survey received 221 total responses (201 were individual and 20 were organizational). Survey input highlights strong community concern about food insecurity and affordability, alongside broad support for local food production, food literacy, climate resilient- practices, Indigenous food sovereignty, and policy action. Across responses, there was a consistent emphasis on the need for coordinated, system -level approaches that move beyond emergency food responses while strengthening local capacity, partnerships, and equity.

About the Surveys

The Food Strategy survey was launched in Spring 2025 and remains open as an ongoing engagement tool. Two survey streams were used:

- **Individual survey** (for residents, volunteers, students, parents, and community members)
- **Organization survey** (for nonprofits, farms, businesses, schools, public institutions, and community groups)

The survey was promoted through:

- Community events and consultations
- Advisory and working tables
- Partner networks
- Website and social media
- Local media coverage

Responses were voluntarily submitted and are not intended to be statistically representative; rather, they provide community driven input to inform priorities, validate themes, and identify- opportunities for collaboration. A copy of the full survey questions is included below.

How Survey Input Was Used

Survey responses were analyzed alongside:

- Community consultation summaries

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- Advisory group discussions
- Working table input

Responses were coded against the Food Strategy's five pillars and cross-cutting themes, with recurring ideas grouped into shared themes. Illustrative quotes were selected to reflect common perspectives without identifying individuals.

Survey findings are presented as:

- Key themes by pillar
- Cross-cutting insights (equity, policy, Indigenous rights and food sovereignty, culture and food literacy, climate and environment)
- Community capacity and offers of support

Respondent Profile

- **Geography:** Orillia, Oro-Medonte, Rama First Nation, Ramara-, and Severn
- **Respondent types:**
 - Individuals (residents, volunteers, students, parents, etc.)
 - Organizations (nonprofits, farms, schools, businesses, public sector, faith groups)
 - Advisory group and consultation participants
- **Interest in supporting the strategy:**
 - Attending events
 - Volunteering
 - Promoting awareness
 - Strategy development
 - Donating or providing in kind- support
 - Hosting or supporting implementation

Key Findings by Food Strategy Pillar

1. Food Insecurity

Themes

- Persistent need for affordable, nutritious food options
- Stigma and barriers in accessing food banks and emergency food
- Calls for systemic solutions (e.g., Guaranteed Livable Income, policy change)
- Desire for dignity, choice, and culturally appropriate food

Cross-cutting insights

- **Equity:** Reducing stigma and ensuring dignified access
- **Policy:** Income-based- solutions and advocacy for systemic change
- **Indigenous Rights:** Food sovereignty and culturally relevant food access

Implications for the Strategy

- Integrate income-based and -dignity centred- approaches
- Prioritize policy advocacy alongside direct service
- Embed equity and Indigenous food sovereignty across actions

2. Food Access

Themes

- Transportation and distance barriers, especially in rural areas
- Desire for more available decentralized food access points
- Limited awareness of available food resources
- Interest in markets, food hubs, and community gardens

Cross-cutting insights

- **Equity:** Addressing rural and transportation barriers
- **Policy:** Zoning, land use, and infrastructure supports
- **Culture & Food Literacy:** Improving awareness and navigation

Implications for the Strategy

- Expand decentralized food access points
- Improve transportation solutions and outreach
- Strengthen partnerships for awareness and resource navigation

3. Food Production

Themes

- Strong support for farmland protection and farmer viability
- Need for new farmers and succession planning
- Interest in community gardens, urban agriculture, and food skills
- Concern about farmland loss to development

Cross-cutting insights

- **Climate & Environment:** Regenerative practices and land stewardship
- **Policy:** Farmland protection and incentives
- **Indigenous Rights:** Land stewardship and Land Back initiatives

Implications for the Strategy

- Prioritize farmland protection, land access and farmer supports
- Integrate climate resilient- production practices
- Support community and -Indigenous led- food production

4. Food Infrastructure & the Local Food Economy

Themes

- Demand for more local markets and year-round- options
- Need for better connections between producers, retailers, and consumers
- Interest in co-ops, CSAs, and local procurement
- Barriers related to cost, awareness, and distribution

Cross-cutting insights

- **Policy:** Local procurement and economic incentives
- **Equity:** Affordability and access to local food
- **Culture:** Celebrating local food and community connections

Implications for the Strategy

- Strengthen local food value chains
- Support innovative distribution and procurement models
- Promote local food culture

5. School Food & Food Education

Themes

- Strong support for universal, healthy school food programs
- Interest in food literacy through gardening, cooking, and nutrition
- Need for kitchens and gardens in schools and community spaces
- Importance of youth and family engagement






Cross-cutting insights

- **Equity:** Universal access to healthy school food
- **Culture & Food Literacy:** Embedding food skills and traditions
- **Indigenous Rights:** Cross-cultural learning and Indigenous foodways

Implications for the Strategy

- Advocate for universal school food and food literacy
- Invest in food infrastructure in schools and communities
- Foster cross-cultural- and intergenerational learning

Cross-Cutting- Themes

-  **Equity:** Dignity, inclusion, and reducing barriers
-  **Policy:** System level- change and advocacy
-  **Indigenous Food Sovereignty:** Indigenous leadership and land-based food systems
-  **Culture & Food Literacy:** Education, skills, and food traditions
-  **Climate & Environment:** Land protection and climate resilience

Community Capacity & Support Offers

- High willingness to support implementation through volunteering, events, advocacy, and in-kind- contributions
- Organizations offering space, staff time, data, and partnerships
- Residents interested in continued engagement and promotion

Organization Representation & Engagement

Organizations contributed through surveys, consultations, advisory groups, and working tables, with many participating in multiple ways.

Sectors represented include:

- Nonprofits and charities
- Farms and food producers
- Schools and school boards
- Public health and healthcare

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- Municipal and township governments
- Faith groups
- Community groups and coalitions
- Businesses (retail and food service)
- Indigenous organizations and First Nations
- Research and post-secondary institutions

Limitations

- Open, rolling survey with self-selected- participation
- Findings are not statistically representative
- Results are intended to complement other engagement methods

Appendix D: Contributing Community Partners

The following organizations are gratefully acknowledged for their contributions to the development of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy. These contributions took place through survey responses, consultations, advisory and working groups, and online and in-person engagement activities.

If we have missed an organization or partner, please accept our sincere apologies. We are grateful for all contributions and support received throughout the development of the Orillia & Area Food Strategy. If your organization should be included, please contact The Sharing Place Food Centre.

Agilec
Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph
Bass Lake Farms
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orillia and District
Blue Moon Junction
Brechin Lions Club
Brewery Bay
Butterfly Rangers
CampHouse Farm
Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)
Catulpa Community Support Services
CFS Counselling & Well-Being
Chappell Farms
Child, Youth, and Family Services Coalition of Simcoe County
Chippewas of Rama First Nation
City of Orillia
ClearWater Farm
Coldwater Maple
Coldwater United Church
Common Earth
Common Stove
Community Action Program for Children – Simcoe County
Community Connection – 211
Couchiching Ontario Health Team
County of Simcoe

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Cronk Maple Syrup
Discover Wellness
Dragon Acres Farm
DWN Craft Chocolatier
Eat Learn Grow
Eat Well To Excel – Simcoe County
Eclectic Cafe
Ego's Nurseries Ltd.
Empower Simcoe
Era 67
Farm Table
Farm to Cafeteria Canada
Food Action Network North Western Ontario
Foxmeadow Farm / TELUS Giving Garden
Fram + Slokker
Friends of the Muskoka Watershed
Georgian College
Granite Ridge Farms
Guardian Angels Church
Harriett Todd Public School
Hog & Penny
Hospice Orillia
Integrated Farms
KH Communications
Lake Country Grill
Lakehead Farm Lab
Lakehead University Faculty & Staff
Lakehead University Students
Leadbetter Foods
LUSU (Lakehead University Student Union)
Mariposa Pollinators
National Farmers Union
New Path Foundation

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Nottawasaga Economic Development Corporation
NuScape Garden Centre
Ontario Farmland Preservation
Ontario Farmland Trust
Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Ontario Pork
Orillia Area Community Development Corp. (CDC)
Orillia & Area Black Community Association
Orillia & Area Good Food Box
Orillia Community Fridge
Orillia Community Garden Group
Orillia Fairgrounds Farmers Market
Orillia Farmers' Market
Orillia Food Access and Sustainability Working Group
Orillia Horticultural Society
Orillia & Lake Country Tourism
Orillia Matters
Orillia Native Women's Group
Orillia Public Library
Orillia Soldiers Memorial Hospital
Pavlik Foundation – Kids Pantry
Picnic
Poppies Bagel Company
Provenance Wine Bar
Rama Maawnjiydiwag Gtigaan – Rama First Nation Community Farm
Ramara Chamber of Commerce
Ramara Township Public Library
Ricetto Farms
Roost Farm & Market
Rustica Pizza Vino
Salvation Army Orillia
Severn Township Public Library
Sharing Place Food Centre

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Shine

Simcoe County District School Board

Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture

Simcoe County Food Council

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Simcoe Shores Public School

St Paul's United Church

Streets Alive Productions

Sunny Nature Farm

Sustainable Orillia

Thai Plate

The Coalition for Healthy School Food

The Couchiching Conservancy

The Fifty Acre Garden

The Lighthouse

The Mom Collective

The Muskoka Farmer

Theo's

Township of Oro-Medonte

Township of Ramara

Township of Severn

Twin Lakes Secondary School

United Way Simcoe Muskoka

Uptergrove Public School

Woegerer Farms

YMCA

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