



# TAKING THE PULSE OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOOD ACTIVITY ACROSS CANADA

A FOLLOW UP TO FERTILE GROUND

**VitalSigns**<sup>®</sup>

Community foundations taking the pulse of  
Canadian communities.



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FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA  
*all for community.*

# FOOD IS GROUND ZERO FOR CANADA'S MOST CHALLENGING ISSUES

As we discovered in our national 2013 *Vital Signs* report *Fertile Ground*, food is the place where some of our most pressing issues converge—poverty, health and wellbeing, our environment and economy—they all hit home at our kitchen tables.

## Fertile Ground

Sowing the seeds of change in Canada's food system

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vitalsignscanada.ca ■ October 2013

Because of their role as local leaders and connectors, community foundations are naturally at the heart of these intersecting issues. While we already know anecdotally about the many ways Canada's 191 community foundations are contributing to support the food system, we wanted to dig a little deeper.

With support from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Community Foundations of Canada conducted a survey in the spring of 2015 to better understand where and how community foundations support and provide leadership around food activity in their community.

As we explore and learn how to collectively drive social change around our food system, we also wanted to develop a deeper knowledge of our network to be able to share the amazing stories of progress that are unfolding across the country and inspire further action.

**THE J.W. MCCONNELL  
FAMILY FOUNDATION**

**LA FONDATION DE LA  
FAMILLE J.W. MCCONNELL**

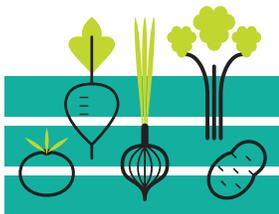
*Thanks to the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.*

*The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada have collaborated over the years to leverage each other's assets, knowledge, skills and networks. Since the launch of our national 2013 Vital Signs report, the McConnell Foundation has been working with Community Foundations of Canada to strengthen our understanding of the role that community foundations play in food activities across the country and the collective steps we can take to build a more equitable and sustainable food system for all Canadians.*

# NATIONAL FOOD SURVEY: AN OVERVIEW OF ACTION

71 community foundations from nearly every province responded to our national food survey.

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## **COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ARE HEAVILY ENGAGED IN THE FOOD SYSTEM.**

An overwhelming majority (91%) of respondents currently support or have supported these much-needed programs that assist the 8.3% of Canadian households that experience food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Mostly this support is in the form of grants to food banks, community kitchens, breakfast programs, and more.



## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO FOOD ACTIVITY EXTEND BEYOND GRANTS.**

Community foundation contributions to food totaled nearly \$4M in 2014 alone. Many community foundations go beyond charitable granting, funding the work of food policy councils, local food asset mapping, agriculture and sustainable food initiatives that help stimulate and support a local and just food economy.



## **COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ARE LEADING THE WAY LOCALLY.**

More than one-third of community foundations said they engage in knowledge development (36%) and leadership (42%) on everything from chairing local poverty and food initiatives to leading local food assessments and funder roundtables. A small but growing number of community foundations have also begun to provide investments such as loans and micro-finance capital for food related businesses or social enterprises.

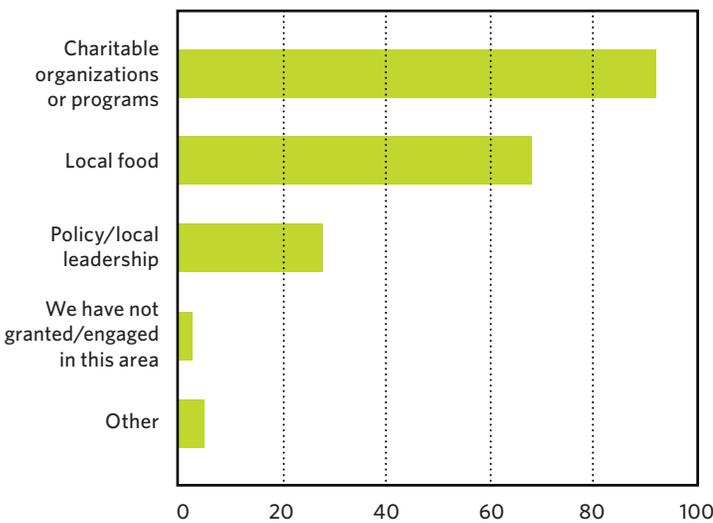
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Since the release of our national 2013 *Vital Signs* report we've seen an increase in awareness and action in food systems across our community foundation network. As the results and stories from this survey show, our movement is eager to engage more fully and more strategically in our collective work ahead.

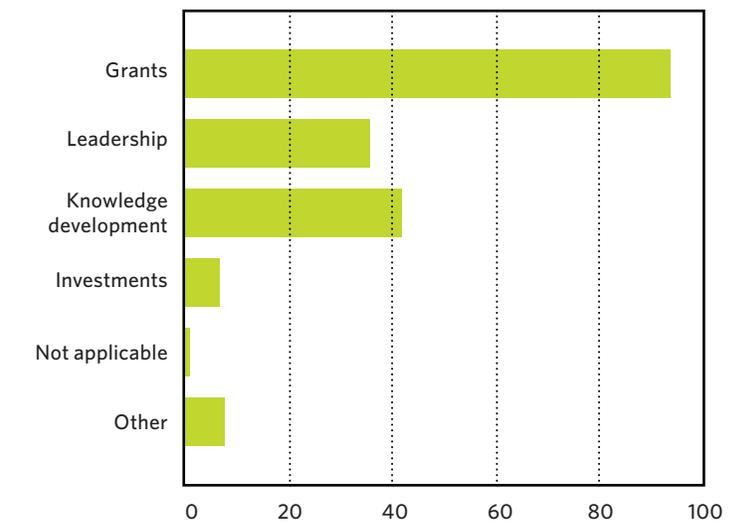
# HOW COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS FUND FOOD WORK

Overall more than 91% of community foundation respondents grant or have granted to food-related work. The majority fund charitable groups focused on food security, such as local food banks, community gardens, community kitchens, breakfast programs, nutrition initiatives, and farmer's markets. However, many are also funding local food initiatives, as well as organizations working on local food policies and leadership.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS WHO HAVE FUNDED OR ENGAGED IN FOOD WORK OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS (%)



TYPES OF SUPPORT COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS PROVIDED TO FUNDED FOOD RELATED WORK (%)



## UNIQUE AND INNOVATIVE GRANTS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF OTTAWA (ON)

Food security was the initial focus of CFO's new annual strategic granting initiative, *New Leaf Community Challenge*. With a challenge to the community, the foundation offered a \$125,000 grant to support a project that would significantly and systematically address local food security. The 2014 winning project was MarketMobile, an initiative developed by the Poverty and Hunger Working Group, a coalition of

various community organizations, Ottawa Public Health and community members. MarketMobile builds on the success of the Good Food Markets by using wholesalers and partners to bring at-cost food directly into specific low-income communities, using a vehicle so that markets can be set up in any community with higher populations of citizens who struggle with access to food.

# HOW COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ENGAGE BEYOND GRANTS

In addition to providing grants to support food activities, community foundations are also contributing beyond their role as a funder:

## 36%

### OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED

that they provided leadership support, such as engaging partners and donors, convening or participating in collaborative groups.

## 42%

### OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED

that they have engaged in mobilizing community knowledge through programs such as *Vital Signs* or other forms of community knowledge and awareness.

## 18%

### OF LARGER COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

provided investments, such as micro-finance and seed capital that support local food organizations and economies.



## VITAL SIGNS AND COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

### CLAYQUOT BIOSPHERE TRUST (BC)

The Trust recently produced a [Food Action](#) plan for their region that explores the assets, barriers and opportunities in their communities related to food and food security. The organization reports on food security indicators through their *Vital Signs* report and convenes community conversations related to local food issues. They plan to update the action plan in 2016.

## FOOD SYSTEM INVESTMENTS

### HAMILTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (ON)

Hamilton is surrounded by lush farmland and hundreds of food producers, but most local foods are tough to find in conventional grocery stores. Recently, the foundation made a loan to the [Mustard Seed Co-op](#), a full service grocery store open year-round that connects the region's best local farmers and food suppliers, all in one place. Its emphasis is on offering locally produced, sustainable food and creating a positive impact on the local economy, community and environment.

### EDMONTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (AB)

The foundation's investment in the [Social Enterprise Fund](#) has made possible loans in food sector social enterprises like [The Organic Box](#), a locally-owned home delivery service focused on organic and sustainably produced food.

## POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES

### FONDATION COMMUNAUTAIRE DE LA PÉNINSULE ACADIENNE INC. (NB)

The community foundation supported the establishment of the Réseau d'inclusion communautaire de la Péninsule acadienne (Acadian Peninsula community inclusion network) whose mission is to decrease poverty in the region. This network is part of the New Brunswick government's approach to reducing poverty through the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation which includes food security as one of their focus areas. This organization is now well established in the community and after three years of support, became a registered non-profit organization.

## LEADERSHIP

### COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF GREY BRUCE (ON)

The community foundation is getting active locally by joining an alliance of citizens and local groups who wish to create a sustainable food centre. They're also hosting sessions about sustainable food on a local TV show, encouraging and funding grants related to healthy food in the community, and focusing a portion of their *Vital Signs* report on food.

### SASKATOON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (SK)

In Saskatoon the community foundation has helped link a corporate funder to a multi-agency group, which led to the creation and funding of the newly formed Saskatoon Food Council.

FEATURE STORY:

# VICTORIA FOUNDATION, BC

Inspired by local food security issues, statistics and stories identified through Victoria's *Vital Signs*<sup>®</sup> report, in early 2013 the Victoria Foundation convened experts and representatives from key groups in the food system to understand the problems better and consider ways to develop solutions.

Some key challenges identified through this work were the fragmentation, overlap and apparent duplication of programs and services being provided and the lack of coordination between the various program and service organizations.

Seeing that there was a clear need for further work in the area, the Foundation then partnered with Victoria Integral Strategy™ Practice to engage with the community to develop *A Collaborative Roadmap for Achieving Community Food Security in the Capital Regional District*, a document that examines all parts of the local food system from food production to food access and consumption, as well as the “enabling capabilities” to support the food system.

The Roadmap has helped to identify both gaps and duplication in the system, as well as to understand opportunities and leverage points for system change. To do this, community groups mapped out their existing activities and projects as an overlay on the Roadmap. Similarly, the Victoria Food Funders, an affinity group of the Victoria Community Funders Network, mapped out their grants in the prior year revealing how their investments reflected where there were gaps in the community. For example, many community gardens and kitchens were both funded and underway. In contrast, while food processing infrastructure was identified as a significant barrier by the community, funders had invested little in this part of the system.

During this process, the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CRFAIR) was identified as the backbone organization to steward the Roadmap and facilitate the collective impact process for food security. More than 50 groups have come together through a “Food Forward Collective Impact” initiative to take a systems-level approach to setting and achieving shared outcomes. This initiative emerged out of the Victoria Foundation’s partnership with Innoweave to hold a series of collective impact workshops in 2014.

At the same time, and emerging out of meetings convened by the Victoria Foundation, the Food Share Network (FSN) was established with more than 40 food banks and other food serving agencies participating. In its first year, the FSN has made significant progress toward 19 action items including decentralizing food distribution to neighborhoods where clients access food hampers. This change has improved delivery and facilitated access to other services and also led to cost-savings for some of the groups through joint-purchasing agreements and other measures.

More recently, the Victoria Foundation launched the *Food Rescue* initiative, building on this collaboration, and bringing together the region’s Rotary clubs and 11 Thrifty Foods (Sobeys) with the Food Share Network. This is a comprehensive food recovery initiative working to recover healthy food from groceries and farmers markets that would otherwise be wasted and get it to people accessing food banks, schools and those in need. The region’s Rotary Clubs undertook a raffle jointly for the first time to successfully raise \$100,000 for this initiative. The Victoria Foundation is matching this \$100,000.

During the above work, the Foundation’s [2013](#) and [2014 Vital Signs](#) reports continued to examine and report on the extent of food insecurity in their city. The Foundation is now aligning its food systems work with the collective impact strategies underway. In March 2015, its Board of Directors approved food security as a three-year strategic granting priority, reflecting both the investment made to date and a readiness to provide even more leadership and investment in this area. The Foundation’s long term vision is to move away from the charitable food bank model toward an empowering ‘food centre’ approach that will transform the way food is grown, distributed and consumed in the region.

FEATURE STORY:

# LONDON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, ON

In 2009, the City of London's Child and Youth Network [CYN] (a network of organizations working collaboratively and changing the way they approach complex social issues by coordinating efforts) began work on a Food Charter.

The need for a Food Charter emerged from the community's shared priorities of eliminating poverty and increasing healthy eating. It was endorsed by City Council in April 2011. The Charter's vision is that London is a food secure community. Along with its endorsement, City Council requested that the Child and Youth Network be responsible in the short term for overseeing the implementation of London's Food Charter and to explore options to establish a sustainable, independent structure in the long term focused on food security.

The CYN launched a number of initiatives and continued to innovate and encourage community-driven food security grassroots initiatives that align with the Ending Poverty and Healthy Eating and Healthy Physical Activity priorities. However, to fully implement London's Food Charter, particularly its commitments around procurement policies, elimination of food deserts, advocacy and supporting local sustainable food production, it was clear there needed to be systems-level change through a cross-sectoral collaborative.

The London Community Foundation had growing concerns about the community's challenge with increasing rates of food insecurity even though many groups were working to address the issue. The Foundation was receiving multiple grant applications to support these efforts yet found them to lack a collaborative and systemic approach.

In November 2012, the Foundation decided to focus the fifth in its series of environmental forums on the local food system. Included among the many action items resulting from that forum, the implementation of a local food policy council was

the preeminent one as it would facilitate undertaking the other action items which included the above-mentioned Charter commitments.

After the forum, discussions were initiated by Martha Powell, President and CEO of London Community Foundation, with the City of London's CYN and the Middlesex-London Health Unit to explore the formation of a food policy council.

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## London Community Foundation played a key leadership role in bringing the food policy council to fruition.

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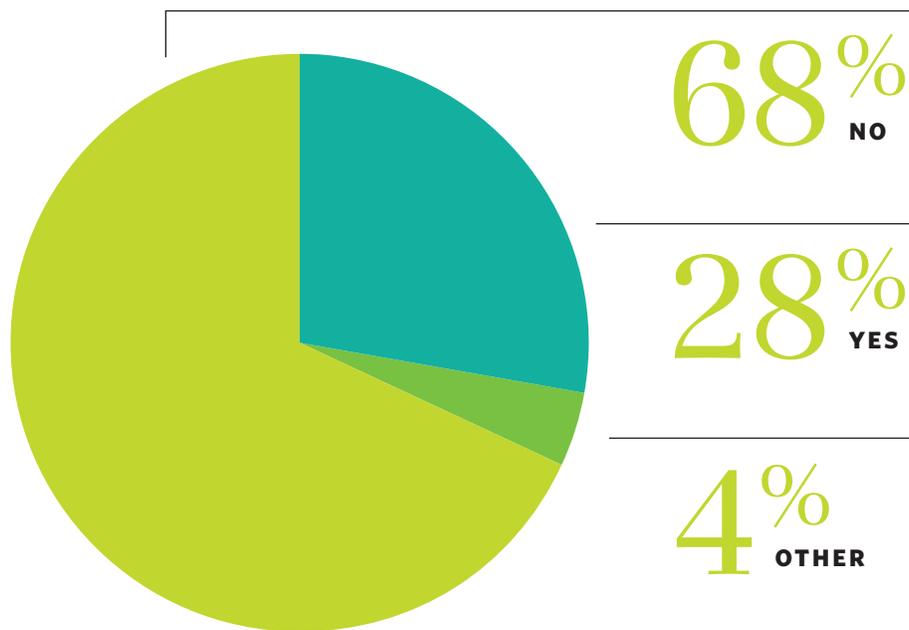
As a result, in February 2014, the three partners hosted a forum to engage the community about the viability of a food policy council in London and Middlesex. Participants discussed the benefits and challenges of a food policy council concluding there was a true need for a council but many considerations to take into account. Since the forum, a working group was formed, a local food assessment was undertaken and a proposed framework for a food policy council was born.

London Community Foundation played a key leadership role in bringing the food policy council to fruition. Although establishing a coordinated food strategy for the region is a bold step in the right direction, there is still much work to be done in this area. The Foundation hopes to continue to engage local stakeholders and work together to establish London a food secure city.

# FUNDS DEDICATED TO FOOD RELATED GRANTING

A total of 20 community foundations that participated in the survey have at least one specific fund that is designated for food work. These funds are often donor designated to support local food banks, nutrition programs, breakfast clubs, or poverty more broadly.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS THAT HAVE FUNDS DEDICATED TO FOOD RELATED GRANTING (%)



## FOOD-RELATED FUNDS THE WINNIPEG FOUNDATION (MB)

Its [Nourishing Potential Fund](#) makes grants to local charitable organizations that provide healthy food and hands-on nutrition education for children and youth in Winnipeg. The \$5M fund has granted approximately \$1M to more than 125 programs/organizations in its first five years.

# CHALLENGES ON THE ROAD AHEAD

While many community foundations are taking strategic steps forward in their contribution to food systems, others identified a number of common challenges affecting their engagement.

Community foundations look to the community for information to guide their food granting, however some found it difficult to make sense of the various organizations working on food in their community and the impact they were trying to achieve as a result.

*When I started three years ago at the foundation, I was shocked by the number of food-related grants coming in. It has taken three years to actually get the right people and right partners to begin to align and now there is some real momentum building towards collaboration.*

*We know it is an important issue. However, sometimes the local area seems to be overflowing with good food because of our orchards and farms. At the same time, local groups have not done a very good job of finding ways to collaborate and create a cohesive system for addressing the issue. This sometimes leaves us, as the funder, confused and frustrated.*

Other community foundations, especially those of a smaller size, wished they had more capacity or unrestricted funds to be able to engage in food-related work.

*We are an agriculture-based county, with food security concerns due to economic challenges. There is certainly some discussion about this in our community and an economic development focus of late on value added opportunities in the food industry. We have an interest in being able to engage more fully with this issue but we are a small community foundation with part time staff and limited capacity to take on additional leadership initiatives at the moment.*

*Though our Smart & Caring Fund was created from some unrestricted funds, our policy is broad and does not specifically identify food as a focus area. Consequently, we do not currently have the discretion to allocate significant funds to the area. As well, due to limitations of the resources, to do so would limit our ability to support other vital programs. We can be a convener, but cannot readily fund the work.*

*We are a small community foundation with limited staff or volunteer capacity. Food security has been a particular interest of a Board member who has spearheaded our work in this area. He has only one more year on the Board, so it depends whether others are willing to step up. However there is a lot happening and plenty of conversation in the community around this issue initiated by others – our community foundation does not need to lead, just be willing to participate and be engaged.*

Some community foundations that are ready to engage shared that the capacity of their local food sector is limited.

*Our 2014 Vital Signs identified Locally Grown Food as one of our “Top 10 Best” of our community. This is of great pride to the residents however poverty was identified among the top 10 most important issues. It is clear that good food is not reaching a sector of the population in need. We are at the forefront of this discussion and are encouraging others to actively donate to support these causes. It is our goal in 2015–2016 to kickstart an endowment fund that supports these causes.*

*There is much interest in a community-wide approach to food security. Groups are interested in sharing best practices, food buying opportunities, leverage of common resources, and more. They are so busy doing the work they do not have time to coordinate and collaborate.*

*While we had two rounds of granting out of an agriculture grants program, we need to be more proactive in identifying opportunities to partner with other organizations and to find good projects to fund – our last round of funding we didn't get enough good applications to give out all the money. We don't know if it is because we are not promoting our grants sufficiently or there is misunderstanding in the industry about eligibility to apply so more work needs to be done in this area as well.*

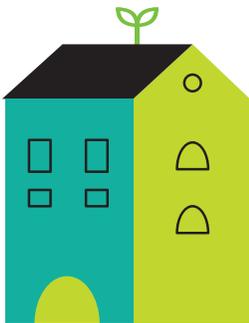
Finally, a small number of foundations raised concerns about stepping out as a convener around food. Though well positioned as local leaders, some community foundations were wary of misperceptions that they had long-term money or capacity to solicit buy-in from other community members and partners to affect change. There was also fear that community members would disengage if they felt like a funder was taking a leadership role.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

While community foundations have a strong desire to fund work in the short term, many are looking to take a more systemic approach and are thinking about longer-term strategies to help communities engage in more structural and transformative ways.

As our knowledge increases about how community foundations engage in food work, a fundamental question remains: What would help community foundations take a more systemic approach to food?

*Here are a few bright spots that could help us with the answer:*



## **HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS AND ALTERNATIVES TO FOOD BANKS**

One of the strongest patterns that emerged from the national food survey is the role that community foundations are playing with groups looking to better collaborate and share knowledge about healthy food and poverty. Some community foundations are sparking local action through connections to their local poverty roundtable group and by focusing their attention on food hubs or food centres to help bring about coordination and collaboration among the various stakeholders in the community. [Community Food Centres Canada](#), for example, is an excellent resource for communities looking to a more holistic approach.

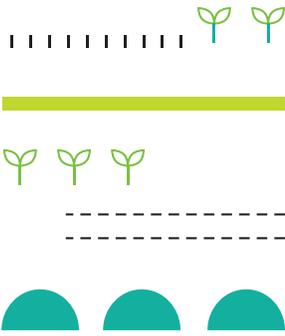


## **BROADER LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD STRATEGIES**

Understanding how food and community intersect and impact each other is a natural place for community foundations to engage. One helpful tool that communities and funders are using across the country are community or regional food assessments. Given the complexity of food systems these assessments can be very resource and time intensive to complete. Yet they offer an opportunity for community members to identify existing resources and assets, assess barriers and challenges, and help to ensure that projects are as strategic and effective as possible. Excellent examples can be found at [Food Matters Manitoba](#) or [Food Secure Canada](#).

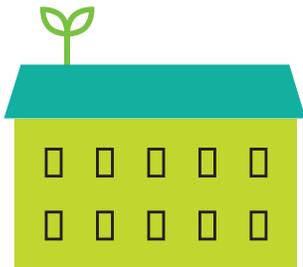
Another solution that many communities are implementing is the creation of a Food Policy Council (FPC) “to raise awareness within the community, cooperate with all sectors of society and work to change food policies at the local level”.<sup>2</sup> The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future notes that there are 57 FPCs in Canada.<sup>3</sup> FPCs may be part of their local governments (such as in Vancouver and Toronto), function as a non-profit, or operate as a mixture of community and government organizations.

Regional or local food assessments and engagement with local FPCs are excellent ways for community foundations to interact with a more connected food sector and help support change at a local level.



## COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE

Community foundations engage in food work well beyond just providing grants. They play a vital role in helping support strategies that connect various partners to address food's complex and long-term issues. One emerging solution to develop these strategies is the desire for funders to connect with each other and work towards sharing information and potentially setting common outcomes. Several community foundations are spearheading this approach through food funder collaboratives. Many of these groups use asset maps or regional food assessments as a starting point to understand the food ecosystem in their community and work towards finding gaps and solutions. Community foundations are also mobilizing *Vital Signs* or *Smart & Caring Community Funds* as platforms for engagement and to highlight opportunities and challenges around food. Working within the community through collaboration across sectors and with other funders is critical to making a difference.



## INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT

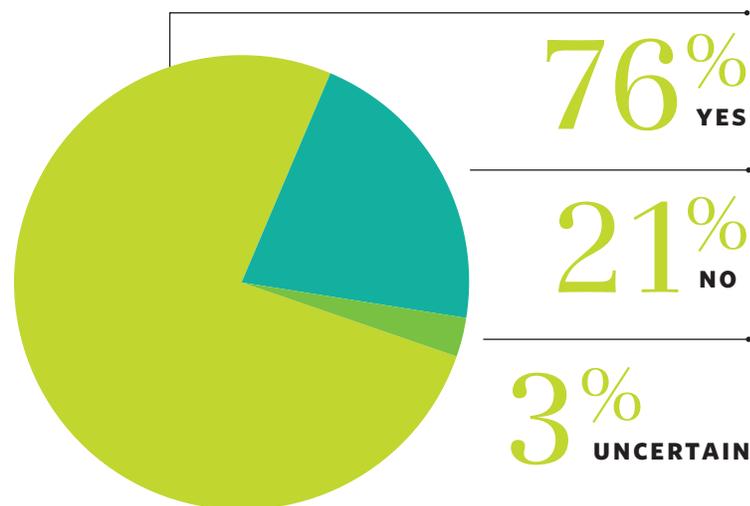
Our local institutions such as hospitals, schools, universities, colleges, and retirement homes provide food to hundreds of thousands of people every day. They also provide services that are deeply connected to supporting the health and vibrancy of people and communities. A number of institutions across Canada have taken up the challenge of bringing good food to a central place in their institutions, seeking better health for students, patients, staff and others. This in turn prompts supply chain shifts toward more just, sustainable food production and systems.

Through its institutional food program, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation is supporting hospitals, schools, long term care centres and universities to transform their practices and increase their supply of healthy, local and sustainable food. This work is often championed by individuals and passionate groups, and has received support from some governments, notably Ontario's Greenbelt Fund. However, good institutional food still remains far from dominant practice. There is a significant opportunity to offer supports, incentives and learning opportunities to change mainstream procurement practices.<sup>4</sup>

We wanted to better understand the relationships community foundations have with their public institutions to see if there is alignment to explore this work in certain communities. More than 76% of community foundations who responded to our national food survey engage with their local public institutions, with the majority holding specific endowment funds.

Community foundations can play a key proactive role in this transformation. By partnering with local institutions that are willing to advance this work, community foundations can leverage new and existing relationships and donors and use their convening power to highlight the importance of this shift.

## COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS THAT ENGAGE WITH PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS (SUCH AS HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS, RETIREMENT HOMES, LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES, ETC.) BEYOND FOOD RELATED ACTIVITIES





## IMPACT INVESTING AND LOCAL FOOD ECONOMIES

Canada's community foundations are exploring new ways to leverage their assets and have already contributed more than \$180M in impact and responsible investments beyond food granting. Seven of the community foundations who filled out our survey have provided investments, such as micro-finance and seed capital that support local food organizations and economies.

In Canada and around the world, there is growing interest in investments into local food economies and one group leading this work is [Slow Money](#). They are an organization, a movement, and an investment strategy that aims to bring money "back down to earth" by fostering small-scale but long-term investment in local food, farms, and fertility.

In 2015, a report was commissioned by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation that examines impact investing in local sustainable food systems in Canada: [Food Farm Fish Finance: Practical impact investment strategies to seed and sustain local food systems](#). The report explores the realities faced by emerging local sustainable food system entrepreneurs and seeks to understand the role access to finance has played in the success, challenges or failures of these entrepreneurs and initiatives. MaRS has an excellent [Starting Point web page](#) for more information.

Funder collaboratives are emerging around food systems in Canada from the local, provincial and national levels. An excellent model for community foundations to explore is [Fresh Taste](#), an initiative by 13 members of Chicago regional community foundations, angel investors, private foundations and local governments. They have come together in innovative ways with the goal of relocalizing the Chicago foodshed and improve equity of access to good food.

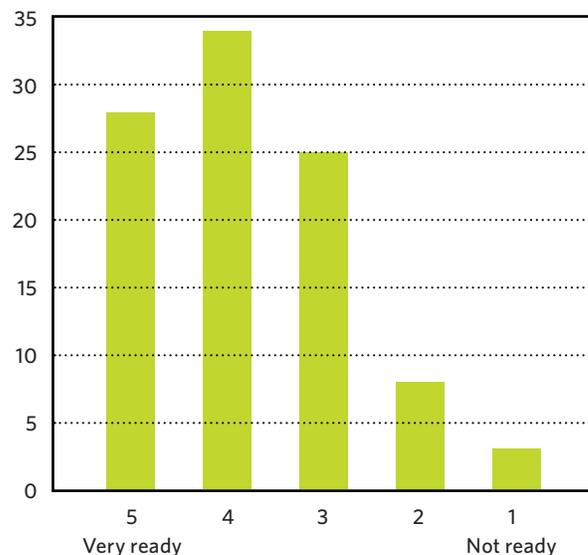
As this field continues to grow, there is tremendous opportunity for community foundations to align their emerging investment strategies with developing their local food economy.



## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS AROUND FOOD

Community foundations feel ready to engage or further engage in food-related conversations in their community. Many cited that although food is not a specific funding field or area of interest for their foundation, they understand the need to support and engage on this pressing issue.

### LEVEL OF READINESS FOR COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS TO ENGAGE / FURTHER ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS RELATED TO FOOD IN COMMUNITY (%)



# A MOVEMENT WITH MOMENTUM

Surveying our network has provided an opportunity to more deeply explore and highlight the great work that community foundations are doing to support their local food systems. More and more community foundations are becoming leaders and champions for food issues and having a significant impact in their communities.

As momentum continues to grow, community foundations have an amazing opportunity to engage and invest with local groups, working collectively to tackle food challenges, engage with other funders, and provide solutions that will create long-term impact. Most of this transformation will rely on developing deeper partnerships and working collaboratively across sectors.

Community foundations have a significant role to play and we're excited to see how they continue to support and spur on food issues in communities across Canada.



1. Statistics Canada. 2015. Health at a Glance: Food insecurity in Canada. Accessed on October 5, 2015. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2015001/article/14138-eng.htm>
2. Just Food. 2015. A Food Policy Council for Ottawa. Accessed on October 5, 2015. <http://justfood.ca/ottawa-food-action-plan/a-food-policy-council-for-ottawa/>
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4. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Sustainable Food Systems: Institutional Food Program. Accessed on October 5th, 2015. <http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca/en/programs/sustainable-food-systems/institutional-food-program>