

Understanding our local food environment



Guelph-Wellington Food Environment Assessment Overview of findings and funding opportunities

People make an average of 200 food-related decisions every day¹ about what, where, when, and how much to eat. Most of these decisions are unconscious, shaped by the surrounding **food environment**: the physical, social, economic, cultural, and political factors that impact our access to nutritious food.

From June 2020 to September 2021, the Nutritious Foods Workstream of the Guelph-Wellington Our Food Future initiative completed the initial phase of a Food Environment Assessment. The Assessment brings together local data and past research to provide a snapshot of food access in Guelph-Wellington. Many research projects and collaborations were formed to gather information: they included spatial mapping, surveys, focus groups, interviews, audits, and document review.

What we learned to date is summarized on the next pages. The Food Environment Assessment will be a launch point for community engagement to identify key actions we can take as a community to improve access to affordable, nutritious food all within the constraints of a circular regional food system. Throughout 2022, the Assessment will continue as we further explore food equity in our community. This work will be anchored for a Food Equity Summit in Fall 2022.

In 2023, the Nutritious Foods Workstream will release a culminating Guelph-Wellington Food Security and Health Action Plan that draws on the research, learnings from funded projects and additional engagement and charts out a path forward over the next five to ten years.

\$50,000 in funding available.

The Nutritious Foods Workstream is providing grants to help address the issues related to food access that are highlighted in this assessment. We are looking for innovative pilot projects that encourage healthy eating, make food more affordable, or increase access to nutritious foods in settings where people live, learn, work or play. Examples may include healthier foods in neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, institutions, etc. Submissions should utilize circular strategies, be innovative, replicable, and support one or more of the following themes:

1. Increase **physical access** to a range of culturally relevant nutritious foods in the places where residents live, work, learn, and play so everyone can make healthy food choices.
2. Increase **economic access** to nutritious foods so everyone can afford a healthy diet.
3. Increase access to opportunities to acquire nutrition **knowledge and food skills** so that everyone can select and prepare healthy meals.
4. Increase **promotion** of nutritious foods so that these foods are valued, celebrated and shared, empowering everyone to eat well and reduce waste.

Additional details and application instructions can be found on page 4 of this document or at www.foodfuture.ca.



¹ <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2006/12/mindless-autopilot-drives-people-underestimate-food-decisions>

Availability and exposure

Highly-processed foods are widely available and promoted in our community. Strategies to reduce exposure and availability of these foods in various settings may be beneficial.



80% of food-related advertisements within 500 metres of schools promote highly-processed foods like fast food meals, ice cream and sugary drinks



In grocery stores, for every display of vegetables and fruit there are approximately **3** displays of highly-processed foods



Like many settings, in rec centres **100%** of food available in vending machines are sweet and salty snacks and **95%** of beverages are sugary drinks because this is what patrons are buying. Rec centre managers have added nutritious options in the past and are interested in testing new strategies



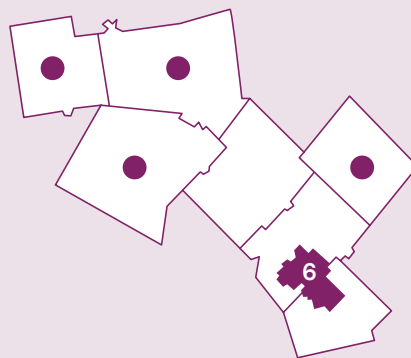
Managers of grocery and convenience stores expressed interest in modifying product placement and implementing subsidy programs

Ease of access

Certain neighbourhoods and townships have minimal access to nutritious foods, while other areas are saturated with opportunities to purchase less nutritious options. Residents may be choosing highly-processed foods due to convenience — and some think it would be helpful to get food closer to home.



Less nutritious retail food outlets (e.g., convenience stores) are found more frequently across Guelph-Wellington than nutritious outlets such as grocery stores



4 townships in Wellington County and **6 neighbourhoods** in Guelph have been identified as geographic priorities for engagement and actions to improve access



60% of grocery stores offer online shopping



People who live in rural areas of Wellington County need to travel further to get to nutritious foods

Food insecurity

Residents agree income-focused actions such as guaranteed basic income, living wages and higher social assistance rates would be helpful to address food affordability and food insecurity. Efforts to expand emergency food services that offer greater autonomy may also be beneficial.



1 in 8 (12%) Guelph-Wellington households are food insecure and almost **two-thirds (63%)** of them reported this was a new experience since the pandemic began



1 in 7 (14%) of Guelph households and **1 in 10 (10%)** Wellington County households are food insecure



Fewer than 25% of food insecure households access emergency food services to meet their immediate needs

Food purchasing and waste

Residents are throwing away nutritious foods while not necessarily following healthy eating patterns. Further education about highly-processed foods, protein foods, and the application of food skills to reduce food waste may be beneficial.



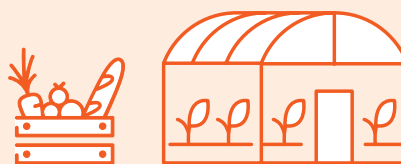
Households throw away **25%** of the edible food they buy from retail food outlets — namely fruits, vegetables, grains and plant-based protein



Residents are purchasing a **greater proportion of animal-based proteins** compared to plant-based

Local programs

There is a lot of food-related programming and infrastructure to leverage and build off in Guelph-Wellington.



39 food access programs, **24 food skills and education** programs, and **57 community agriculture** spaces were identified in Guelph-Wellington

The assessment was led by the Nutritious Foods Workstream of the Our Food Future Smart Cities Initiative. The Nutritious Foods Workstream is a collaborative of health and social service organizations dedicated to increasing access to nutritious foods. For more information, visit foodfuture.ca or contact the City of Guelph Smart Cities Office at 519-822-1260 extension 3559 or foodfuture@guelph.ca

Funding available to improve food access in Guelph and Wellington County

The Nutritious Foods Workstream is looking for ideas that encourage healthy eating, make food more affordable, or increase access to nutritious foods in settings where people live, learn, work or play in Guelph-Wellington, and leads to a regional circular food system.

Apply for Spark Grant funding to accelerate your project or idea.

Spark Grants provide an opportunity to submit a ready to implement idea, receive input, lead a project, and access funds quickly. Rather than just filling out a funding application, applicants will first socialize their idea online through Our Food Future's online engagement platform called Kitchen Table, and have an opportunity to receive community feedback and identify possible collaborations across projects.

Applicants will complete a two-step online application process. Step 1 involves posting a 200-word description of your idea(s) on Kitchen Table. Step 2 involves being invited to submit a more detailed proposal that will be evaluated by a review team. A total of \$50,000 is available for multiple small-scale food access initiatives. We encourage ideas in the \$5,000-\$10,000 range and submissions should not exceed \$20,000. Anyone can apply, including individuals, non-profits, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, etc.

Follow these steps:

- a. Download the Spark Grants Program Guide [here](#).
- b. Submit your idea [here](#). Application deadline June 3, 2022.
- c. Shortlisted projects will be announced on June 17, 2022
- d. A full project proposal will be due from shortlisted applicants by July 15, 2022.
- e. Winners will be announced by August 15, 2022.

In addition to the Spark Grants, \$20,000 will be announced this summer for Community Agriculture Grants. This funding will support community food production efforts throughout the region. The Community Agriculture Grants builds on the interest in increasing the community's capacity to grow food that was shown in the 2020 Guelph-Wellington Urban Agriculture Challenge.



**Helping Everyone in
Guelph-Wellington
Access Nutritious Food**

Community Conversations to Guide Action