



## Food Access

Nutritious food is essential for good health. Access to safe, dependable, affordable and healthy food improves both individual health and health of the community. Although Ontario has an abundance of nutritious food, not everyone has easy access to it. Some communities do not have grocery stores or farmers' markets. This means that some people need to travel long distances to buy nutritious food.

Food security means safe, healthy, affordable and personally acceptable food is available to everyone. Food-secure communities value local food and understand the impact on the environment (e.g. food that travels long distances contributes to climate change). These communities recognize the importance of agricultural land, and the need to preserve and protect farming land, water and other resources. Communities designed with food access in mind can result in improved food security for everyone.

## Did you know?

-  People are more likely to meet their nutritional needs when they have easy access to grocery stores that sell healthy, safe and affordable food. Fast food outlets and convenience stores sell processed/packaged food, which is more expensive and less nutritious.
-  There are over 10 farmers' markets throughout York Region, with at least one farmers' market in each municipality.
-  Community and roof top gardens help communities become more self-sufficient. Gardening improves healthy eating, promotes social interaction and it's also good exercise.
-  Approximately 38% of York Region is used for farming. In fact, York Region includes part of the Holland Marsh, which is one of the largest vegetable producing areas in Canada.

# Building Healthy Communities



## You can make a difference when you . . .

- Buy locally grown vegetables, fruit and other healthy foods.
- Ask grocery stores and restaurants (and other places where food is served) to provide more local food.
- Participate in community, roof top or other shared gardens. You can make your community more self-sufficient, beautiful and neighbourly.
- Learn more about community food programs and services available in your area.
- Learn more about your municipality's official plan and how this plan can be used to promote access to healthy food.

## Municipalities show leadership when they . . .

- Make it easy for people to shop for healthy foods. Zoning bylaws should ensure healthy food is available in all parts of a municipality. Grocery stores, farmers' markets, produce stands and other food vendors need to be close to the people they serve.
- Identify community garden sites in spaces such as parks, underused areas, and land around schools and recreational facilities. Garden groups need to be provided with start-up support and access to water.
- Support a local food charter and set up a local Food Policy Council. Municipal governments, community organizations, farmers and community members can work together to improve access to local food.
- Adopt land use policies that protect agricultural land.
- Consider both healthy eating, and local food policies at recreation centres and municipal buildings.

**Be an active partner where you live, learn, work and play.  
Participate in building healthy communities!**

Adapted with permission from Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

For more information, refer to other fact sheets in this series or contact  
York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933.  
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