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INTRODUCTION

In addition to highlighting the findings and recommendations in the full Food Charter Evaluation Report, this Executive Summary provides some additional background on the Food Talk initiative and the Community Food Connections Association. As well, it expands on the conclusions and the recommendations to align these with the collective impact approach to food security and community development.

In the spring of 2014, the Food Charter Committee of the Community Food Connections Association (CFCA) undertook an evaluation of the Food Charter initiative to identify what changes, if any, may have occurred related to building a food secure community following their 2013 promotion of the Food Charter. This evaluation involved completion of an open ended survey, which was completed via email by some of the signatories, and via telephone interviews for those who preferred verbal communication.

Four questions were asked of the survey respondents:

- 1) What is your organization currently doing as a result of signing on to the Food Charter?
- 2) What points on the Food Charter were relevant for your organization?
- 3) What does your organization plan to do in the future as a result of signing on to the Food Charter?
- 4) Would you like additional information on the Food Charter?

The telephone interviews were conducted by a SCIP Student Volunteer, Erin Stodalka B.Sc., who then collated these with the email responses that were submitted. The final report subsequently created to summarize the process and findings is titled, "Food Charter Evaluation" dated June 2014; and can be found on the CFCA web-site at www.foodconnections.ca. The

findings in this report will inform the next steps for the Food Charter Committee in moving the needle on food security.

BACKGROUND

The Food Charter originated as a result of an extensive Asset Mapping initiative that occurred through 2006-2007 involving a series of workshops titled Food Talk, supplemented by numerous focus groups carried out by the CFCA Food Talk Committee. These workshops were facilitated by Growing Food Security in Alberta (GFSA), a provincial organization co-founded by the Alberta Health Regional Community Nutritionists and a variety of key stakeholders from across the province in 2003. The primary mandate of GFSA is to build awareness and action towards creating food secure communities across the province of Alberta.

"Food security is a situation in which all residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through an economically and environmentally sustainable food system that promotes community self-reliance and social justice" (Hamm and Bellows, 2003).

Through funding from Dietitians of Canada, GFSA contracted Susan Roberts, an Alberta-based community development consultant with expertise in food security, to engage rural communities across the province in addressing community food security. This was followed by a series of Asset Mapping Workshops on food security, leading to unique, place-based action in the participating communities.

In partnership with GFSA, the CFCA spearheaded the local initiative; additional supporters were the former Healthy

Alberta Communities and Palliser Health Region Community Nutrition/Health Promotion Department, as well as varied key community members with a passion for creating a food secure community. Accordingly, the CFCA established the Food Talk Sub-Committee to implement this local project, with members as follows: Gitta Hashizume (GFSA), Robbie Fairhurst (City of Medicine Hat); Marcia Stodalka and Emily Burt (PHR Community Nutrition), Molly Hansen-Nagel (Healthy Alberta Communities), Bev Downie, Heather Prindiville, Joanne Smith and Julie Friesen (AB Culture & Community Development). The Food Talk Committee also hosted a series of focus groups with a goal of engaging citizens with lived experience in food insecurity in this initiative. This contributed to an increased understanding of food security issues, assets and barriers and solutions amongst the group. The resulting summary report, titled *Food Talk*, can be found on the CFCA web-site at www.foodconnections.ca.

The Food Charter emerged as one of the strategic outcomes of the Food Talk initiative in 2007.

THE FOOD CHARTER

A food charter is a set of values, principles and priorities that reflect the collective vision of citizens in a community to promote healthy, sustainable food environments (community food security). Charters can also address child/adult hunger, low nutrition status (household food insecurity) and the related negative health, social, cultural and economic impacts.

The Food Charter achieves these purposes by serving as promotional vehicle for the collective vision of food security that emerged from the Food Talk gatherings. It is an essential tool that helps to facilitate the needed awareness and understanding

of food security issues and sustainable solutions in the community, as well as to guide actions to create the change needed. Over 300 citizens from Medicine Hat and the surrounding communities participated in the Food Talk work that contributed to the development of the Food Charter.

The thirteen principles of the Food Charter were developed to align with the vision of the Food Talk processes that identified a strong need to move the community from a primary focus on emergency and charitable food programming to a more preventative, sustainable focus involving food systems, policies, and capacity building.

To complete the development of the Food Charter, the committee formed to take on this task reviewed various food charters from other communities and provinces, as well as the findings from the Food Talk Report and Asset Mapping workshops. Committee members included: Kathy Farrell, Les Pearson, Marcia Stodalka, Ann Pudwell, Robbie Fairhurst, Connie Matson, Lois Bourassa (Can. Mental Health) and Connie Dulle (Salvation Army). Once completed, the Charter was released to the Food Talk participants in 2008. Unfortunately, following the initial launch activities promoting the Food Charter, several Charter Committee members had to leave this project due to organizational changes. This loss of manpower in the group led to disbandment of the Food Charter Committee for some time.

RENEWED ACTION

The Food Charter initiative then remained dormant and lost significant momentum over the next few years. In 2012, an earlier key stakeholder, Les Pearson (Alderman for the City of Medicine Hat by that time), reignited the Food Charter flame. The Food Charter Committee was re-established,

made up of a small group of CFCA members as follows: Diane MacNaughton (Chair), Les Pearson, Elizabeth Sauer, Marcia Stodalka, Michelle Hill (Sec.), Ann Pudwell, Cathy Woolfrey (ex-officio). From 2013 to 2014, the Food Charter Committee carried out a strategy to engage community organizations in endorsing the Food Charter to signify their alignment with at least one or more of the Food Charter principles and their organization’s mission. In January, 2013 a successful presentation by the Food Charter Committee to the Palliser Triangle Health Advisory Council led to their endorsement, and proved to be an important milestone. In total, twenty-three organizations, in and around the city of Medicine Hat, gradually became official signatories including many non-profit organizations and several school divisions.

In the spring of 2014, Les Pearson spearheaded the adoption of the Charter by the City Council of Medicine Hat, via the Social Development Advisory Board. Together with previous endorsements from the Town of Redcliff and Bassano FCSS, the Food Charter Committee endorsement targets had been met. This identified the need for this Evaluation to guide next steps in addressing community food security.

METHODS

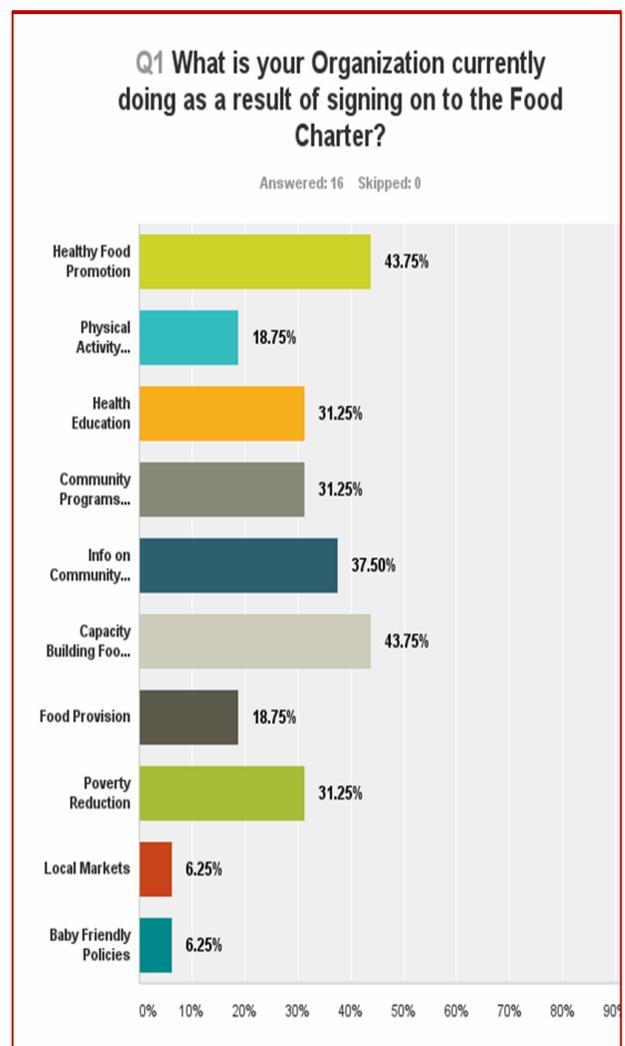
In undertaking this evaluation, the Food Charter Committee intended that the increased awareness and understanding of food insecurity that developed amongst the organizations engaged in the signing processes would, in turn, stimulate an increase in actions. The promotion process, in most instances, involved a short presentation by Food Charter Committee members given to selected agencies or boards, followed by a brief question and answer period and the provision of a handout with information about the issue, effective strategies and solutions.

FINDINGS

In total, 19 of the 23 surveys distributed were answered, resulting in an overall response rate of 78%.

Question 1: What is Your Organization currently doing as a result of signing on to the Food Charter?

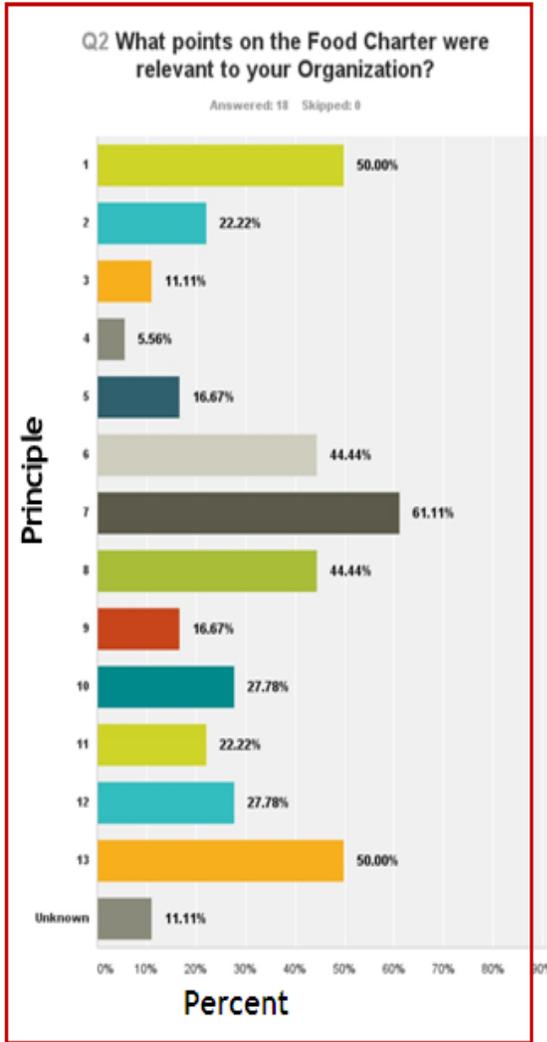
Activities reported in this open-ended question were divided into 10 themes.



The most common themes reported were. **Promoting Capacity Building Programs** and **Healthy Food Promotion**, each at 44%. The two activity themes with the least amount of reported actions at 6% are: **Promoting Local Markets**, and **Baby Friendly Policies**.

FINDINGS, CONT'D.

Question 2: What points on the Food Charter were relevant for your organization?



- Principle 7 received 61% of the responses, while Principles 1 & 13 each received 50% respectively.
- The least relevant principles were Principle 4 (6%), and Principle 3 (11%).

See Abbreviated List of Charter Principles at top right on this page.

Abbreviated List of Food Charter Principals:

1. Advocate for policies that support secure/dignified access to healthy food.
2. Produce/distribute food in a way that protects the environment/food safety.
3. Establish local market opportunities.
4. Encourage agriculture policies/practices that promote diversity.
5. Promote informed choice through a food labelling program.
6. Support capacity building food programs.
7. Facilitate access to programs/services for vulnerable populations.
8. Increase access of healthy foods in recreation facilities/schools/day cares.
9. Promote baby-friendly policies.
10. Increase access to healthy/affordable foods in residential or care facilities.
11. Eliminate marketing of unhealthy foods to children/youth.
12. Contribute to a yearly community review on food security.
13. Promote access to community programs that promote nutrition and prevent disease.

Question 3: What does your organization plan to do in the future as a result of signing on to the food charter?

- Most organizations (67%), intend to continue progress on Principle 7 and Principle 6 (61%).
- The Principles identified for future action the LEAST number of times are Principles 5, 10, 11. The response to Principles 2, 3 and 9, was also very low.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Collective Impact

Complex problems such as food security, require many stakeholders working together to achieve meaningful results. This section will compare what has been learnt about the impact of the Food Charter against the five conditions for achieving collective impact:

- Shared vision or common agenda
- Shared measurement
- Mutually reinforcing activities
- Continuous Communication
- Backbone support organization

Shared Vision. Food Charters are tools that can help communities to gain traction on complex issues. However, due to the time lapse since the original Food Talk Asset Mapping work was completed (which led to the creation of the Food Charter), the survey responses indicate that the community may need to revisit the collective vision and principles and reaffirm their buy-in, as well as identify their priorities, in order to move beyond *signing on* to the Charter.

Shared Measurement. The challenge presented to the committee in trying to obtain specific data on food security initiatives utilizing the survey process has shown a need to improve data collection methods. This will enable the community to track key indicators that align with community priorities in regards to food security. Stronger partnerships and additional resources will also be needed to build capacity amongst key stakeholders and the Food Charter Committee to do this in a consistent and efficient manner.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities. Despite the broad ranging principles of the Food Charter, the range and variety of activities reported on in the survey results illustrate a lack of cohesiveness amongst community

stakeholders. While the charitable sector coordinates much of their activities to some extent, via the Crisis Assistance Network and the Community Food Connections Association, these activities relate primarily to charitable food. Improvements to enable ALL individuals to access community resources like the Farmer's Markets, Grocery Stores (the usual ways of accessing food) could greatly increase individual/household food security. Increasing access, to local food suppliers and healthy foods in schools, recreation centres, and other public venues would also be beneficial.

Continuous Communication.

Communicating awareness of issues, promising solutions, and sharing signs of progress as communities work together is vital to collective impact. People from all walks of life, organizations, social services, government, business, education, etc., can learn to trust one another and value each other's unique contributions through open and frequent communication. Given the willingness of many organizations to reply to the Food Charter survey, this could be interpreted as a strong indication that several of the stakeholders are interested in having increased opportunities to communicate with one another about their food security concerns.

Backbone Support Organization. A neutral coordinating committee, not focused on advancing their own profile, is needed to coordinate the collaborative work and provide non-threatening leadership in the community to ensure the issues stay on the agenda of stakeholders. Such an organization has the ability to mobilize resources and people, and respect the mandate of unique partners.

The Food Charter Committee has already begun this process with the development and launching of the Food Charter and this evaluation. It may be in the best interests

of the community to explore ways the Food Charter Committee can enhance its ability to fulfill this function, in partnership with other organizations in the community such as Moving and Choosing, the Poverty Reduction initiative, etc.

Conclusions

Question 1: Current Practices?

Qualitative, open-ended survey methods appear to work well for some stakeholders; others would have been able to answer this question more easily from a list of answers to choose from. Also, direct methods of getting feedback can be more helpful for exploratory types of questions. Given that most agencies stated their activities were part of their usual work rather than initiated as a result of signing on to the Charter, it is more likely that the Charter supported these activities and increased awareness, rather than instigating them.

Question 2: Relevant Principles?

Most people seemed to understand the Charter principles, and how they link to practice. Thus, a reason for the low relevance rating of some of the Charter principles is likely due to the lack of diversity of the types of organizations invited to respond to the survey. It is also possible, that little work in relation to these low rated Principles is underway or has lower awareness in the community.

Question 3: Future Plans?

Given that several agencies indicated that Principles 6, 7, 8 were areas they were involved in as well as planning to do more of in future, these could represent an opportunity for coordination of effort to increase the collective impact of this work.

Given that principles 1 and 13 were ranked high on the relevance factor in Question 2, but did not rank as high on the future

Actions Question 3, more information would be helpful to better understand this contradiction. Possibly, these organizations need some support in offering these types of services, or additional resources.

Question 4: More Information?

Given that most respondents were interested in the results of this survey, and expressed an interest in additional information, an opportunity to build on this initial work could be appropriate; even it this means to gather additional information to better inform some of the questions raised in these results.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase measurement capacity to improve consistent data collection on key indicators of food security. Share this information with the community often.
2. Increase the diversity of stakeholders engaged in food security initiatives.
3. Develop a communication/social marketing strategy to increase community involvement and collaboration.
4. Update the Food Talk Asset Mapping baseline data by conducting a Community Food Assessment to help with strategic planning/priority setting.
5. Explore the formation of a food policy council with key stakeholders to tackle Principle 1 which could increase action on root causes of food security and provide a backbone organization for this work. These should be strongly linked with or part of the CFCA and City Council.
6. Strengthen partnerships with key organizations working on collective impact, poverty reduction and food security.

COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEASTERN ALBERTA – A 2014 PROFILE



DEVELOPMENT

The Community Food Connections Association (CFCA) is a non-profit organization comprised of volunteers, agencies and citizens concerned about food, nutrition, health, social justice, the environment and local agriculture. The members share a common goal of improving the quality of life for EVERYONE and believe healthy food is a right for all. The CFCA originated as the Food Security Coalition in 1998 under Health Connections; a local non-profit organization which became a Registered Society in 2000. When the Food Coalition incorporated as a non-profit society in 2003, the name was changed to the Community Food Connections Association of SE Alberta to reflect its primary networking role of bringing people together to build a food secure community. Founding members of the Food Coalition and later the CFCA were: Marcia Stodalka (Chair), Robbie Fairhurst (Secretary), Pat MacIntosh (Treasurer), Connie Dulle, and Thelma Cowan. In 2009, the CFCA Executive Committee structure changed bringing in Cathy Woolfrey as Treasurer and Ann Pudwell as Chair, and several other board member positions also changed.

COMMUNITY KITCHENS

Community Kitchens consist of a group of people who get together on a regular basis to cook healthy, low cost meals. Each kitchen is set up a little bit differently to suit member needs. Participants experience a range of benefits:

- Increased food preparation skills and enjoyment of cooking
- Making new friends, improved mental well-being and reduced isolation
- Increased ability to meet food and nutrition needs for themselves and their families

At their peak in 2001, approximately twelve Community Kitchens were operating. A cut back in grant funding in 2002 resulted in a reduction in the CFCA Coordinator's hours of work. This led to a gradual decrease in Community Kitchens operating to just three or four by 2008. With added funding from FCSS in recent years, leading to increased hours for coordination, the Community Kitchens have experienced a modest increase in capacity and participation; and home canning and other food skills classes and programs have been introduced.

GOOD FOOD BOX



The Good Food Club is a group buying club that provides fresh fruits and vegetables, local when possible, at wholesale prices through the power of bulk buying. The Good Food Box Club was established in 2000 under the auspices of the former Food Security Coalition; and flourished under the CFCA to the current 160 to 180 members now actively engaged in the club. Benefits often described by participants are:

- Saves money as foods are purchased at wholesale prices
- Increased variety and quantity of fruits and vegetables in their diets
- Experience a sense of community from working with others and supporting local producers

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens provide space for community members to plan, grow and share their produce with their family and friends. Currently, there are two gardening spaces located in Medicine Hat and one in Redcliff, totaling approximately 80 garden plots. Gardening is a great activity to escape from the noise and commotion of everyday life; work side by side with others and transform empty lots into beautiful green spaces! Members of Community Gardens reap many benefits, as does the community:

- Increased access to healthy, great tasting, affordable food
- Increased physical activity and mental well-being
- Promote safe and caring communities
- Promote socialization and community building



THE HAT FOOD MOVEMENT

The Hat Food Movement is a grass-roots group that promotes and supports sustainable food resources. Community members, organizations and businesses are invited to participate and share their ideas for a healthy, sustainable community.

THE FOOD CHARTER

We believe every person has a right to access an adequate supply of nutritious affordable and culturally appropriate food. Food contributes to the health and well-being of residents while preventing disease and reducing their need for medical care. Food is central to Alberta's economy. Food brings people together in celebration of community and diversity and is an important part of our culture.

The Food Charter is a collective VISION for guiding our community in achieving great things through food policy and actions that promote equity, sustainable agriculture, and healthy communities. Key impacts of Food Charters:

- Reduced need for a reliance on emergency food programs and improved wellness
- Development of a safe, sustainable and accessible food system for All

The local Food Charter was first developed in 2008 through a community engagement process involving more than 300 citizens from Medicine Hat and Redcliff, including individuals with lived experience in food insecurity. Thirteen Principles were developed to guide and support the collective vision. To date, there are twenty-three signatory agencies that have signed on, including the City Council of Medicine Hat. The Food Charter group recently conducted a survey to measure collective impact, and is now developing a new action plan to move forward.

FOOD IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS – Contact CFCA:

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