

CITY OF WHITEHORSE

# Local Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy

Public Survey: What We Heard



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[whitehorse.ca/localfood](http://whitehorse.ca/localfood)

## Public Engagement & Survey Overview

In March 2016, the City of Whitehorse initiated a planning and public consultation process to develop a *Local Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy*. The process is geared at identifying barriers and creating opportunities to better connect residents to the local food system whether through production, processing, distribution, selling, consumption, or resource recovery. The process is made possible with funding from the Canada-Yukon Growing Forward 2 Agriculture Program.

The first phase of project engagement occurred in summer 2016 involving agency and public outreach to understand:

- How residents are currently participating in the local food system
- What is working
- What can be done better
- Ways that the City can be more active in supporting the production and consumption of local food

Input was collected through interviews, a public survey, and pop-up engagement booths at the Yukon Government Agriculture Demonstration Day and Fireweed Farmer's Market. A social media campaign was used to raise awareness about these engagement opportunities.

A total of **159 people filled out the public survey** that was available from August 1 to September 2 on the project website ([whitehorse.ca/localfood](http://whitehorse.ca/localfood)) and in hard copy at the booth events. This document provides a summary of the input submitted by survey respondents. The survey questions are contained in Appendix A. The information generated through the survey and other engagement activities will help to inform the development of a Draft Strategy, anticipated later in 2017.

## Themes & Trends

The intent of the survey was to identify themes and trends in activities related to the local food system. The following overarching topics emerged in the responses:

- Policies & regulations
- Land, infrastructure, & services
- Funding
- Access & connections
- Education

The majority of survey respondents (89%) indicated that they participate in **local food production**. Many expressed their involvement in growing vegetables and fruits for themselves and their families. A few respondents indicated growing herbs, other edible plants and flowers, and hay. Some respondents indicated keeping chickens (5%) and other poultry (3%). A few respondents (4%) indicated either raising pigs, rabbits, or keeping bees. Harvesting berries, mushrooms, and fish was also indicated. Some respondents indicated participation in **processing** (16%) and **selling** (6%), and some (9%) indicated they do not currently participate in local food activities.

Subsistence, self-sufficiency, and food security were mentioned as **motivators for participating** in food activities along with having access to fresh, healthy, organic, ethical, economical, and sustainable foods. Educational benefits and donations to the food bank were also listed as reasons for producing local, as well as off-setting grocery bills. Business and financial gain were mentioned, but for most did not appear to be a significant motivator.

Many respondents (61%) indicated that they would like to pursue **additional food activities**. Some indicated interest to expand their current vegetable varieties, including wanting to plant heritage and unique edibles (e.g. Siberian pine nuts, kohlrabi, quinoa). Planting berries and fruit trees, greenhouse growing (including during winter), and mushroom cultivation were indicated as potential future pursuits. Some respondents indicated wanting to keep bees (4%), chickens (14%), other poultry or small livestock (4%) (e.g. ducks, quails, rabbits, goats), and large livestock (2%). Making preserves (e.g. canning, pickling, freezing, jam and syrup making) and wanting to process milk and cheese were also mentioned by a few respondents.

When asked about the **location of food activities**, the majority of respondents (76%) indicated they have activities that occur on their own private property. A smaller number (10%) indicated they have activities that occur at a community garden or greenhouse. A couple of respondents (4%) indicated they have activities that occur on someone else's private property. There was overlap for some respondents whose activities take place on their own property as well as at a communal space or on another person's property. A couple of people indicated they collect edibles from landscaping on public lands.

Food activities were indicated to occur in **neighbourhoods across Whitehorse** with Riverdale, Downtown, Porter Creek, and Takhini being the most frequently mentioned areas. Some activities were indicated to be occurring outside of City limits in areas including Carcross, Ibex Valley, Mendenhall, Golden Horn, Mount Lorne, Jackson Lake, Tagish, and along the Fish Lake and Hot Springs Roads.

## Challenges & Suggested Solutions

The majority of survey respondents indicated that they have not encountered challenges or barriers related to their food system activities. Some indicated being unfamiliar with policies and regulations, having never pursued food activities that require a permitting process. Respondents that did indicate experiencing challenges (18%) listed the following as issues encountered. Suggested solutions collected from responses to various questions are also listed.

### Policies & Regulations:

#### Challenges:

- Jurisdictional overlap between different levels of government for agriculture related policies and regulations can make it difficult for people to know where to look for regulations
- Research and interpretation of agriculture and zoning regulations can be overwhelming for some
- Some regulations in the City's Zoning Bylaw could use clarification (e.g. distinctions between principal and secondary agricultural uses) and some definitions appear to be missing (e.g. for small scale hobby operations and bee keeping)

- Properties in urban areas are currently not allowed to have apiaries (bees) and certain kinds of small livestock (e.g. goats), but some residents are interested to have them
- Restrictive fence height regulation is unsuitable to contain hens that can jump and flutter
- Lack of restrictions on pesticide use can lead to soil contamination, and can result in soils unsuitable for growing food or for pasture use
- Regulations on boulevard and median use are unclear relating to food installments on public lands (e.g. food planter boxes)
- Current regulations make it too easy and cheap for grocery stores to throw away food instead of donating it, or using it for compost or animal feed
- Some small-scale food producers and processors have difficulty conforming with federal and territorial health regulations
- Restrictions on the sale of unpasteurized products prevents production of some locally produced foods (e.g. milk and cheese)
- Restrictions on sale of locally harvested wild meat make it inaccessible to some people
- Zoning and leasing can be complicated for starting new community gardens

### **Suggested Solutions:**

- Develop a municipal strategy that complements the Yukon Government's Local Food Strategy
- Allow for urban beekeeping and follow apiary guidelines developed by other municipalities (e.g. Vancouver)
- Ban or further restrict the sale and use of toxic pesticides
- Allow food production installments to count towards landscaping requirements for new developments
- Create a no-waste policy for grocers
- Make it more expensive for the commercial sector to throw out foods versus donating
- Remove policy barriers that prevent farmers from accessing foods that are passed their best-before dates for use as livestock feed or compost
- Allow for the sale of raw products, provided that hygienic standards are met

### **Land, Infrastructure, & Services:**

#### **Challenges:**

- Limited amount of community gardens and greenhouses, and some residents have limited access to them
- Plots at community gardens can be small and may not provide enough growing space
- Disconnect between people that have available land and would-be gardeners
- Land is expensive
- Building gardens and greenhouses is expensive
- Some condo developments do not allow people to plant gardens
- Need for easy and inexpensive access to commercial grade kitchens for processing and preserving food (e.g. cooking, canning, pickling, jam-making)
- Limited access to the community egg grader
- Limited access to inspectors to oversee mobile abattoir, especially on weekends
- Early and late season access to water at community gardens can mean lost productivity
- Vandalism of gardens

### **Suggested Solutions:**

- Create more locations and opportunities for community gardening, including use of vacant public and private lands
- Create opportunities for more communal facilities (e.g. gardens, greenhouses, kitchens, graders, abattoirs)
- Create gardening opportunities in a variety of residential, commercial, and institutional settings, including educational and correctional
- Create a program that pairs would-be gardeners with land owners interested to share their properties with others for gardening (e.g. “lawn farming” on private property where “rent” is paid in produce)
- Promote rooftop gardening on commercial buildings
- Allow for more community use of the Frank Slim Building kitchen
- For landscaping, invest in native perennials that can produce food
- Grow edibles on public lands that are accessible to everyone
- Repurpose old buildings for use as greenhouses
- Develop a community greenhouse in Shipyards Park
- Design urban lots sized to accommodate gardening uses
- Ensure access to municipal water at community gardens early in the growing season
- Have inspectors available on weekends for community abattoir
- Allow for people to slaughter their chickens on their property without requiring an abattoir

### **Funding:**

#### **Challenges:**

- Difficulty in financing garden start-up costs
- Limitations in the availability of funding and grants

#### **Suggested Solutions:**

- Make it easier for gardeners to obtain grants and funding
- Provide funding for workshops
- Provide subsidies to help farmers produce local foods and for local food programs
- Offer incentives and/or tax benefits for growing local food
- Offer financial assistance for greenhouse and plot construction, as well as soil building
- Provide rebates on energy used in greenhouses

### **Access & Connections:**

#### **Challenges:**

- Not enough local food available at grocery stores, most travels from the US
- The price of local food can be higher than imported food, and unaffordable to some
- Sale of ungraded eggs is limited to farm gate, which means having to travel far for purchase
- Some people in our community go hungry and do not have access to fresh food or gardening opportunities
- Some people produce more food than they need, while others don't have enough space to grow food

### **Suggested Solutions:**

- Plant edibles and gardens on public lands that everyone can take from
- Promote exchange programs for locally produced fruits and veggies
- Promote food-plant transplant exchanges
- Promote seed libraries
- Offer fruit tree saplings to interested property owners
- More promotion of locally produced foods in grocery stores
- More local food vendors at the farmer's market
- Sponsor a greenhouse that supplies the Food Bank

### **Education:**

#### **Challenges:**

- Lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding on various agriculture topics prevent involvement, expansion, and diversification of food production activities (e.g. seed varieties, construction methods, soils, fertilizers, compost production and use)
- Lack of knowledge and understanding on how zoning regulations apply to private property use

#### **Suggested Solutions:**

- Develop informational resources on agriculture and regulatory topics
- Provide education opportunities on keeping of small livestock (e.g. backyard chickens)
- Offer agriculture focused workshops
- Develop community gardens at schools

## **Techniques & Technologies:**

In responses to several survey questions, respondents listed techniques and technologies of interest, including the following:

- Winter greenhouse gardening
- Waste heat use for greenhouse gardening
- Solar powered heating systems for plant roots
- Grey water use from ponds
- Hydroponics
- Vertical farming
- Polyculture planting
- Expansion of edible landscaping varieties



## Innovative Ideas:

Respondents were asked if they knew about innovative projects, policies, or regulations seen in Whitehorse or elsewhere that they would like the City to know about and consider in this process. The following was indicated:

- Seed library run by YG Energy Mines and Resources
- Annie Lake road property that uses polyculture planting to promote growth and yields
- Edible landscaping in Ottawa
- Ambulance department in another city that maintains a community garden
- Lawn-farming in Ottawa and Florida where owners let gardeners without land use their properties to grow food
- Inuvik's community greenhouse converted from former hockey area
- Vacant lots in downtown Vancouver used as community gardens
- Community Food Centres in Perth and Stratford (Ontario) that combine activities for social justice, food security, and urban agriculture
- Edibles planted in public spaces and on vacant lots in New Orleans that are free for taking or at low cost for people in need
- No waste policy for grocers in France
- La REcyclerie bistro and urban farm in Paris located in a former train station



# Appendix A: Survey Questions

The City has initiated a process to develop a **Local Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy** for Whitehorse, and ***we want your input!*** We are currently reviewing existing City policies and regulations to identify where gaps may exist and where improvements may be needed. Please fill out the questions below to help us shape this review process. The goal of the Strategy will be to provide recommendations for how the City can better support a robust, local food system.

1. Do you participate in any of the following aspects of the local food system? (check all that apply)
  - Growing/Producing
  - Processing
  - Selling
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - I do not participate (skip to question 6)

2. If you answered **yes** to question 1, what is it you do? (e.g. grow veggies, or raise chickens)

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3. Where does your activity take place?
  - My private property
  - On someone else's property
  - At a community garden/greenhouse
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which neighbourhood/area does this activity take place in?

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5. What is the purpose of your pursuit?
  - Hobby
  - Commercial
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Is there something that you would like to grow, process, or sell in the future?
  - Yes
  - No

If **yes**, please explain:

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7. In relation to your current or intended local food pursuit, have you encountered any barriers related to policies and/or regulations (City or Yukon Government)?

Yes  No

If **yes**, please explain:

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8. If you answered **yes** to question 7, can you propose a solution to removing this barrier? Please explain.

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9. Are there any innovative projects, policies, or regulations (in Whitehorse or elsewhere) that you would like us to know about? Tell us about it.

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10. Is there anything else you would like us to consider in this process?

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11. Providing contact information is optional. If you would like to receive more information on the process, please provide your email address below:

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