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## **Kitchen as food hub: adaptive food systems governance in the City of Toronto**

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This paper discusses how the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) and Toronto Food Strategy (TFS), as part of the municipal government of Toronto, work to facilitate a number of community food and food systems initiatives. We use the example of community kitchens to illustrate how their work facilitates access to community space around the city and, in the process, supports the creation of food hubs. Outcomes of this discussion are twofold: we identify community kitchens as current and potential food hubs, and speak to their capacity to promote a myriad of community benefits and address some aspects of community food insecurity. As well, by offering an account of the work of the TFPC and TFS in facilitating access to increased kitchen space, we highlight efforts of inter-scalar urban organising and adaptive food systems governance.

**Keywords:** community kitchen; adaptive governance; municipal food policy; Toronto Food Policy Council; Toronto Food Strategy

Friedmann (2007) credits Toronto with having a vibrant “community of food practice”<sup>1</sup> which has developed over the last two decades and has come to include more than networks of individuals, but also private businesses and vibrant non-governmental organisations. This community of practice is distinct, notes Friedmann, in the way “it also includes the specific functions of a municipal government body” (p. 395), namely the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) and Toronto Food Strategy (TFS). These two food-oriented institutional entities are embedded within Toronto’s municipal infrastructure and are pivotal actors in the Toronto community of food practice. Community kitchens have emerged as one of many community food and food systems initiatives that the TFPC and TFS promote to increase access to healthy food in Toronto. Framing community kitchens as food hubs, this paper places the activities of the TFPC and TFS, particularly their efforts to facilitate access to public kitchen space, in the context of urban food security.

The TFPC is a 30-member citizen advisory council that was formed in 1991 as a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health. The TPFC provides a forum for dialogue and policy deliberation from a food systems perspective, promoting a range of food security programmes from urban agriculture to healthy food access (MacRae 1994, Welsh and Macrea 1998, Blay-Palmer 2009). Toronto Public Health (TPH) and the TFPC championed a Food Strategy for the city, and in 2010, the “Cultivating Food Connections” report was endorsed by the Board of Health and the City Manager. This marked the beginning of the TFS team, situated within the Healthy Communities directorate at TPH. The city

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staff of the TFPC and TFS work on the same team at TPH and the TFPC acts as the community reference group for the food strategy's implementation process. The TFPC and TFS has identified community kitchens as one of many community food and food systems initiatives that the TFS facilitates in collaboration with other colleagues at TPH, as well as with multiple other city divisions and community partners in order to promote access to healthy food in Toronto. Framing community kitchens as "food hubs", this paper uses the activities of the TFPC and TFS, particularly their efforts to facilitate access to public kitchen space, to contribute to the discussion in this special issue on food hub development, regional food systems, and adaptive food systems governance.

Community kitchens add a unique scalar dynamic to the discussion of food hubs, revealing the connections and potential linkages between actors at the community and city levels as well as the potential for urban food hubs to contribute to food systems governance (Cash *et al.* 2006, Mendes 2008). We begin by providing more history about Toronto Public Health, and specifically the TFPC and TFS, focusing on how they engage across municipal government and with the community to promote a wide variety of food systems initiatives. From there, we present a literature review of community kitchens, tracing the contours of both academic and grey literature sources in Canada, in order to define community kitchens in a new light – not as meal or food assistance programmes, but as current and future food hubs that promote community resilience and community food security by facilitating community participation and engagement in food systems issues. We go on to describe how the TFPC and TFS began to explore ways in which community kitchens could be more deliberately facilitated in municipally managed recreation centres. Finally, we conclude by bringing these elements together in a discussion of adaptive food systems governance.

Theory on adaptive governance suggests how human-made institutions can work to sustainably manage complex social-ecological systems by fostering resilience and adaptive capacity (Berkes and Folke 1998, Carpenter *et al.* 2005, Boyd and Folke 2012). The food system along with regional and urban environments can be regarded as interacting social-ecological systems (Juhola 2012; see also Stroink and Nelson 2013). Adaptive governance suggests a social science interpretation of resiliency and adaptive capacity (Folke *et al.* 2005, Hudson 2010, Pike *et al.* 2010). From this perspective, central to these notions is the ability of communities to lessen their vulnerability to what are perceived as exogenous shocks, but which have localised repercussions (Hopkins 2008, Bristow 2010, Pendall *et al.* 2010). An example of this dynamic is the food price crisis, where multiple global factors in finance and energy markets had effects on localised food prices (Clapp 2009). For Bristow (2010) adaptive governance becomes the ability to encourage "resilient places" (p. 162), where bottom-up initiatives are facilitated.

Our discussion proposes that the example of community kitchens in Toronto showcases how the TFPC and TFS enact adaptive food systems governance. By enabling community food initiatives, the TFPC and TFS contribute resilience and adaptive capacity to the community of food practice, as well as foster renewal in the food system more broadly. Renewal in this context is understood as the emergence of a health-focused food system (Baker *et al.* 2010, Toronto Public Health 2010).<sup>2</sup> We illustrate that through neighbourhood-based community food activities (community kitchens is our example), inter-scalar bridges are built between communities and the municipality, self-organisation is promoted and validated, and finally, community leadership is nurtured. This inter-scalar bridging, however, requires forging deliberate connections between communities, agencies and organisations, and city staff across departments.

On this note, it is necessary to briefly describe our methodology: how we explain our findings and warrant our propositions. At times we insert ourselves into the story that follows, particularly as we recount the processes of municipal facilitation and advocacy. This work builds a 12 month experience in which the authors engaged in community kitchens work in research placements within and alongside the TFPC. In the summer of 2011, one contributing author of this paper, Lindsey Lenters, as a Master of Public Health student, began a four-month practicum placement with the TFPC and was assigned to take the lead on developing a municipal policy toolkit for community kitchens. A second Masters of Arts in Geography student, Joel Fridman, began his placement with the TFPC in the fall of 2011. Fridman took on a role as a participatory action researcher as one of the many researchers contributing to the projects described in this special journal issue, and from there took over the community kitchens work from Lenters. In the pages that follow, we as authors try to make as clear as possible when we are acknowledging ourselves as part of the process and when we are stepping back, as researchers, students, and academics, to contribute our insights.

### **Toronto's urban foodscape and food systems capacity in TPH**

In recent decades, food and farming policy fragmentation has compounded consolidation and industrialisation of Southern Ontario's food economy (Baker *et al.* 2010). This combination of policy fragmentation and corporate concentration has had profound effects globally, and the Southern Ontario region is no exception.

Characteristics of the conventional industrialised, long-distance food system are linked with many public health indicators, especially when related in contexts of poverty. In Toronto, one in five families live in poverty (United Way 2011). Moreover, this poverty is concentrated in Toronto's inner-suburban neighbourhoods (Hulchanski 2005). Noteworthy is that these neighbourhoods house the highest concentration of newcomers, lack both transportation and social services, and are where Toronto's various "food deserts" manifest.<sup>3</sup> In Toronto's inner-suburban neighbourhoods, food affordability, availability, and inadequate public transportation have created barriers to accessing healthy food (Baker *et al.* 2010, Scharf *et al.* 2010, TPH 2012). Toronto has seen a 14% increase in the number of client visits to food banks since 2008, reaching over one million in 2011 (Daily Bread Food Bank 2011). Clearly, there are problems of food distribution and uneven access to healthy food associated with the conventional food system, and these problems are resulting in poor diets and associated health outcomes like obesity and diabetes (Dubé *et al.* 2009, Baker *et al.* 2010). Associated as well is the declining ability to shop for food and cook in a healthful way, which is related to income level, eaters' restrictions on time and mobility, and other factors of social isolation (Baker *et al.* 2010).

In terms of complex adaptive systems, then, each of these food systems problems weakens food system sustainability and community resilience to environmental, social, and economic shocks. Structural barriers to choosing how one engages in the food system – for example, distance from fresh fruit and vegetable vendors, or a lack of cooking skills or facilities – can reinforce negative feedback loops. These varied food issues are interconnected to environmental, social, and economic systems in myriad, multi-dimensional, and complex ways (Meadows 2008). Efforts to address growing concerns about the food system must be considered within the context of broader environmental, social, and economic context.

Both the TFPC and TFS are situated institutionally within TPH. TPH works to reduce health inequalities and to improve the health of the whole population of Toronto. A broad

range of services are provided to individuals and communities across Toronto, and TPH advocates for public policies that make Toronto healthier. TPH's services are funded primarily through a cost shared arrangement between the City of Toronto and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. TPH is governed by the Toronto Board of Health, which comprises elected city councillors and citizen representatives.

The TFPC was founded in 1991 as a sub-committee of the Board of Health to advise the city on food policy issues as well as advocate for healthy, sustainable, equitable food policies and programmes throughout the City of Toronto. The TFPC is a citizen council made up of 30 citizen stakeholders that span the whole diversity of the food system: from eaters to farmers, community workers to representatives from the food industry and food business owners. The TFPC has designated seats for farmers, youth, and city councillors. The TFPC's mandate is to (1) advise and support TPH in the development of food security policies and programmes; (2) advocate for innovative community food security programmes across the city; (3) foster dialogue about food issues; and more recently, (4) serve as the community reference group for the TFS. The TFPC has a full-time coordinator and administrative support provided by TPH.

The TFS is the newest food-focused entity to be embedded in the municipal government. The TFS was initiated in 2007, championed by the TFPC members. The TFPC coordinator at the time supported the TFS development and worked along with other senior city staff, TFPC members, and food sector leaders in the development of the Food Strategy. The result of this collaborative effort was a report entitled "Making Food Connections", released in 2010 and endorsed by the Board of Health and City Manager. The TFS team was established to guide the implementation of the strategy. The team is located in the Healthy Communities directorate of TPH and comprises 4.5 full-time staff, who report to the Director of the Healthy Communities directorate. The TFPC staff are now a part of this team, all focused on bringing a food systems perspective to TPH and the City of Toronto. The TFS's mandate is to support a health-focused food system and the Food Strategy identifies six priority areas to guide this work. These are (1) support food-friendly neighbourhoods; (2) make food a centrepiece of Toronto's new green economy; (3) eliminate hunger in Toronto; (4) empower residents with food skills and information; (5) connect city and countryside through food; and (6) embed food systems thinking in government (Toronto Public Health 2010). A key approach of the TFS is to create an enabling policy environment for new food systems initiatives to flourish. This is done by collaborating across TPH and other city divisions, as well as with the community, on a variety of food systems initiatives (see Mah and Thang 2013, for a more complete description of the TFS's approach). Although the TFPC and TFS have slightly different mandates, they collaborate very closely, work synergistically, and share office space.

The relationship, in function and design, between the TFPC and the TFS is illustrated in the sixth proposed direction for action: *embedding food systems thinking in government*. To achieve a healthy and sustainable food system, the TFS identifies that *horizontal management* is required. In a municipal context, this means "collaboration across city divisions" (Toronto Public Health 2010, p. 24). The TFS also recommends the establishment of "mechanisms in the local government to identify food opportunities, coordinate food initiatives and partnerships both within government and the community" (Toronto Public Health 2010, p. 24). This approach builds on the experience of the TFPC to engage diverse actors to think about and contribute to Toronto's food system (Fox 2010). The TFPC with its many community and business leaders around the table now serves as the community reference group for the TFS. Food Strategy updates are regularly on the TFPC agenda, and many TFPC members are involved in Food Strategy initiatives. The TFPC is particularly well

placed to accomplish the task of *horizon scanning*, that is, looking for food opportunities both inside and outside of government. The TFPC continues to develop and inform policy recommendations that are put forward to both the Board of Health and the City Council. Since its inception in 2010, the TFS team represents new capacity for food systems thinking at the municipal level in Toronto.

The governance of the food system, the formal and informal rules and connections that dictate how we grow, process, transport, eat, and dispose of our food, is made up of a number of actors across public, non-governmental, and market institutions. The TFPC and TFS, however, are unique in their position inside the municipal government to advise, enable, and implement policy and programmes that directly shape and influence the food system. In this regard, the TFPC and TFS provide a fruitful focus for analysis of institutions, organisations, and governance of the food system.

### **Community kitchens: history and background**

Community kitchens have a long history in Canada and have taken on many shapes and forms over the decades. As they currently exist in Canada, community kitchens can be traced back to 1985 when three low-income women from Montreal decided to cook together as a way of pooling limited resources (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2005). Whereas the tradition of community kitchens began in individuals' homes, the "community kitchens" discussed here, in our paper, represent formalised programmes that take place in community or public space and are typically embedded within community organisations, agencies, or government-run programmes.

Defining a "community kitchen" is a deceptively difficult task. Beyond the numerous definitions found in the peer-reviewed literature, there are also various definitions found in the grey literature, and in addition, a host of definitions used by agencies and organisations involved in some way in community kitchens.

Formalised community kitchens are typically used for more than the preparation of food. There is usually an element of learning led by a trained professional, such as a community leader, chef, or dietitian. Community kitchens are regularly used as a platform for teaching, skills building, breaking down social isolation, and other health promotion activities (Fano *et al.* 2004). Of the community kitchens studied by Tarasuk and Reynolds (1999), all were associated with an organisation, received partial or full financial support, and had an employed coordinator/organiser. The present-day institutionalised conception of community kitchens is important to consider when moving into a discussion of the barriers encountered in initiating and maintaining these operations and initiatives, which is what we will consider when we discuss the role of the TFPC and TFS as promoters of community kitchens.

All community kitchens involve groups of people preparing food together, yet the activities vary depending on the context, with implicit values and perspectives embedded within different conceptualisations of a community kitchen. For example, the way in which different groups understand the term "community kitchen" has countless implications, including how shared space is used, how funding is provided (or not provided), the details of permits, fees, rules, and regulations related to kitchen access – and the list goes on. To understand the challenges and issues surrounding community kitchens, acknowledging the myriad ways that stakeholders understand and employ the concept of community kitchens in different ways is important.

The definition that appears most commonly in the Canadian peer-reviewed literature was proposed by Tarasuk and Reynolds (1999, p. 13): "Community kitchens can be

loosely defined as community-based cooking programs where groups of people . . . meet regularly to prepare one or more meals together.” Through their study of community kitchens in Toronto, Tarasuk and Reynolds (1999) partitioned community kitchens into three categories. “Collective kitchens” that focus on batch cooking to reduce the cost of food for members, “cooking classes” that focus on building food knowledge and skills, and “communal meal programmes” that typically consist of members gathering periodically to prepare and eat one meal together.

Meanwhile, a detailed definition is provided by the Ontario Association of Food Banks (2011, website):

A community kitchen is a publicly accessible environment where anyone can cook meals for themselves and/or their families. Community kitchens will often have a small access or membership fee, and can have kitchen groups where people meet regularly to cook meals together. They are often used to stretch people’s dollars, but they also function as a community gathering point. In some cases, community kitchens are also used to train those in need in the culinary arts, so that those who were once hungry can become professional chefs, and feed their family well. There are a number of community kitchens in towns and cities across Ontario.

Fresh Choice Kitchens (2011, website) in Vancouver uses a definition that includes the aspect of the physical space in which a community kitchen takes place:

A community kitchen is a group of people who get together regularly to cook and eat together or cook and bring food home. Groups most often cook in community centers, neighbourhood houses, apartment building or hotel common rooms, schools, housing co-ops or people’s homes. Kitchens meet once a month or once a week . . . whatever the group decides.

While there are a myriad of definitions for community kitchens, we hope that over time working definitions of community kitchens come to encompass a more food systems perspective (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2005), where community kitchens are recognised for impacting social determinants of health as well as promoting healthful food choices and practices through food skills exposure and education. At the moment, however, no definition fully encompasses the creative and innovative types of community kitchens that can be seen in Toronto, as illustrated through the following examples of community kitchens occurring across the City of Toronto.

TPH facilitates community kitchens and food skills programmes for many different audiences. Hands-on cooking opportunities are a way of bringing food and nutrition information to life. Dietitians and Public Health Nurses within TPH lead programmes like “Colour It Up” which aims to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and takes place in a kitchen facility. The Peer Nutrition programme supports caregivers of children of ages six months to six years. The “Investing in Families” programme is a partnership between TPH, Toronto Employment and Social Services, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PF&R) and engages participants in nutrition and cooking programmes. City staff access city-owned/managed kitchen facilities, but have observed that it is difficult for independent community groups to book this space, get the necessary insurance, or verify that the kitchen is certified by a Public Health Inspector.

Unison Health and Community Services coordinated an initiative to support and build capacity among community kitchens in a specific geographical area. The initiative was part of a grant, and through this grant, groups were provided with equipment and training. A resource on developing community kitchens was created, in addition to other resources made available on the “Community Cooking Connections” website (Unison Health and Community Services 2011).

Community kitchens in Toronto can also have a social enterprise component and act as incubators of new catering or food business ideas. For example, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee is a group that is active in planning and leading community building activities centred around the public park in their neighbourhood. The group uses community kitchen space at a local recreation centre to prepare food for their summer bazaar (Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee 2011).

The Hub Mid-Scarborough is an integrated service delivery facility funded in part by United Way and managed by Scarborough Center for Health Communities. United Way community hubs bring a range of health and community services to underserved inner-suburban neighbourhoods with the intent of building individual capacity and empowering communities. The Hub Mid-Scarborough houses a state-of-the-art kitchen and a part-time health promoter who coordinates the kitchen activities. A group of community members who obtained their food-handler certification have been using the kitchen for small catering activities. Additionally, free weekly meals prepared in the kitchen have been used as a way of drawing community members into The Hub Mid-Scarborough, where they then have access to many other health and social services (Scarborough Center for Healthy Communities 2011).

Access Alliance, a Community Health Center that serves newcomers to Canada, runs several community kitchen programmes. One such programme is "Newcomers Cooking Together: Men's Edition". This community kitchen programme provides men with the opportunity to share their favourite recipes, learn new food skills, and develop social networks. The programme is run by the dietitians at Access Alliance (2011), but strongly emphasises leadership on the part of participants.

The Stop Community Food Centre understands a community kitchen with a variety of programme elements as central to their community food centre model. This model clusters together many initiatives to address hunger, poverty and health, build community and support local agriculture (Levkoe and Wakefield 2011). Community Food Centres Canada, recently launched as a separate organisation from The Stop, aims to replicate this model across Canada.

Foodshare Toronto also has its own version of community kitchen programming. They remark that their "kitchen space is a hub of cooking, training and food production" (Foodshare 2012, website). Their community kitchen programmes aim to promote healthy eating, cooking skills, and a strong sense of community. One programme brings together trained chefs with groups of young people to prepare simple meals on a budget. Another brings together nutritionists and dieticians with women who have survived breast cancer, or who are undergoing treatment, and provides space to explore diets that sustain patients during treatment and maintain health after treatment is complete. In the experience of Foodshare (2012, website), "the sense of community and support [a community kitchen] affords participants is often as helpful as the food itself".

That there is no singular definition or conceptualisation of "community kitchen" perhaps points to one of the strengths of this type of community food programming. In order to work towards better supporting the development and maintenance of community kitchens, however, it would be beneficial to work with a common language and understanding of the broad range of potential benefits community kitchens can offer. In addition, it is essential to open channels of communication between potential users of community kitchens and the staff of organisations and institutions, who either have programme ideas or potential community kitchen facilities, and as well to understand how multiple stakeholders with a variety of interests can work together to support community kitchens for them to flourish.



### **Community kitchens as a food hub**

Community kitchens are often evaluated against measures of individual-level food security, considering the impact on household food resources, or behaviour change outcomes such as consumption of fruit and vegetable servings per day (Tarasuk and Reynolds 1999, Fano *et al.* 2004). In this regard, opinions about the effectiveness of community kitchens in promoting food security are mixed. For example, Tarasuk (2001) presents a critical view of the ability for community-based approaches to impact food security in Canada. According to Tarasuk (2001), food insecurity in Canada is primarily an issue of income security, and the provision of some additional food or augmented food skills that can be provided by community kitchens has very little impact on the underlying causes of food insecurity.

Others see community kitchens as a way of building capacity, connections, and resilience within a community. Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum (2005) suggest that community kitchens can act as a health promotion strategy by impacting several social determinants of health, including social support networks, education, personal health practices, coping skills, and healthy child development. As well, community kitchens are often seen as a less stigmatising option for obtaining emergency food provisions and thus may be preferred over using a food bank. Furthermore, community kitchens promote self-efficacy through increased food knowledge and food skills when the focus is on empowering or building capacity among participants (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2005).

Tarasuk (2001) expresses reservation with respect to the “self-help” conceptualisation of community kitchens and suggests that by focusing on individualised and community solutions, the issue of food insecurity is depoliticised, and the emphasis on the government’s responsibility to address food insecurity is decreased. Indeed, Tarasuk’s reservations are worth heeding and harkens to a debate regarding neoliberal subjectivities that is fleshed out elsewhere in this issue (see Mount and Andrée 2013).

However, framing community kitchens as neighbourhood food hubs can capture some of the more systems-focused possibilities that community kitchens provide: connecting individuals to each other, animating public space, linking people to city infrastructure, as well as to food system decision-making at the city level. This frame does not necessarily take community kitchens out of the purview of food and income security politics, but rather acts as one lever available to link people into food systems governance mechanisms.

There are certainly opportunities to increase nutrition-related knowledge and food skills through community kitchens, emphasising self-efficacy, but there is so much more potential for community kitchens particularly when embedded within other social services and community food initiatives (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2005). Food is a huge draw – it is inviting, and comforting, and it acts as a non-intimidating way to bring people together. Additionally, certain types of community kitchens offer the potential for employability, for example, when participants are engaged in social enterprise development, provided with food-handler certification, and are given the opportunity to develop catering skills. Moreover, by conceptualising community kitchens as one of a cluster of community food programmes, Community Food Centres Canada (2012) engages programme participants in social policy advocacy, connecting people either experiencing food insecurity or interested in food security issues and amplifying their political voices.

In this article, we are linking our work on community kitchens in Toronto to the discussion on food hubs by exploring kitchen sites as a new scale of food hub activity, a micro-scale, illustrative of the organising potential of community food initiatives as they proliferate across urban neighbourhoods in Toronto and beyond. In these spaces, food is used as a

community animation tool, to galvanise communities to think about and act on food justice issues. The challenge, then, is to facilitate this work and connect it to broader policy processes – for example, influencing the planning process at PF&R, shaping the discussion at TFPC meetings, influencing the work of the TFS, and connecting to broader advocacy campaigns. The concept of “food hub”, applied to inner-city neighbourhoods organising around food in a myriad of ways, provides useful language to understand the interrelationships between community initiatives (like community kitchens) and broader food system policies and programmes. These micro-hubs provide a focal point for connecting across neighbourhoods and into the municipal government framework. Although this is a nascent development in community food organising, the potential for inter-scalar bridging is revealed and forms the foundation for adaptive food governance that could contribute to broader food systems change.

To summarise, community kitchens have the potential to address a range of social and health-related issues: community kitchens can promote food knowledge and skills for health and wellbeing, counter social isolation by strengthening bonds within the community as members gather to prepare and eat meals together, and may reduce the cost of food for community members. Community kitchens often take place alongside multiple community food initiatives in a given neighbourhood or within a community setting, for example, community kitchen users often are also engaged in community gardens, bake ovens, food markets, and bazaars. Food plays a powerful role in bringing people together, and community food programming can act as a catalyst for countless community development initiatives and broader policy advocacy. Overall, community kitchens can build capacity, connections, and resilience within a community. But community kitchens also face a number of challenges. They are resource intensive and, because community kitchens involve multiple stakeholders working together, there are many opportunities for friction. It was through acknowledging these broad benefits and challenges that the TFPC and TFS began to explore how they could facilitate the use of kitchen facilities for community kitchens in municipal community and recreation centres.

### **Enabling access to community kitchens**

The idea for the community kitchens initiative arose through a confluence of factors. By working closely with community partners on various projects, the TFPC and TFS have a window into the experience of community groups. Anecdotal evidence from community partners suggested that certain groups were facing challenges accessing space for community kitchen programming. At the same time, kitchen facilities exist in community and recreation centres across the city. Was there a way to connect interested community kitchen groups to these existing facilities?

A number of challenges were identified, including a lack of information about where kitchens are located and a lack of availability of existing kitchen space, complex booking procedures, and high permit fees. There is also particular demand for kitchens that have passed an inspection by Public Health Inspectors, as cooking in inspected kitchens is a requirement for community groups who wish to sell/distribute prepared food at community events and markets. The TFS team felt they could facilitate this inspection process for community groups.

The TFPC members proposed the idea of creating toolkits to enable and support community food initiatives such as community kitchens, urban gardens, and bake ovens. Graduate students provided focused support for this project from the start. Lenters and Fridman worked closely with TFPC and TFS team to gather the information necessary to form the

foundation of a toolkit and develop relationships with PF&R to understand how access to community/recreation centre kitchen space could be facilitated.

The TFS team is working to collaborate with community kitchens stakeholders, TPH (both Health Inspectors and Chronic Disease Prevention), and the Toronto PF&R division (because they manage the community and recreation centres where active and potential community kitchens are located) to broaden understanding of the potential benefits of community kitchens and facilitate access to existing kitchen facilities. The priority of the community kitchens initiative is to connect city infrastructure to city users and to identify barriers to equitable access to city resources. Lenters and Fridman reviewed the community kitchens policy environment and collated data and community feedback. This work took the form of (1) *The Community Kitchens Booking Toolkit*, an analysis of baseline policy and booking procedures for community kitchens in PF&R facilities. This document establishes a starting point for advocacy and discussion. It also serves as a potential resource for community groups; (2) the *Community Kitchens Discussion Paper*, which summarised key themes from Canadian peer-reviewed literature and key informant interviews of registered nurses and dietitians at TPH as well as representatives of community agencies; and (3) *The Community Kitchens Inventory*, which was developed in conjunction with PF&R to provide baseline information about kitchen infrastructure in community centres across the city. The surveys were distributed to all the community recreation centres in the city by PF&R, with a response rate of nearly 90%. The survey provided information about the kitchen facilities and the scope of kitchen use throughout the city. For example, some kitchens that were equipped enough to pass inspection were not inspected, while other inspected kitchens had capacity for higher usage. The community kitchens initiative overall has laid the groundwork for the City of Toronto to provide clearer information among stakeholders, especially potential community users, and enhance the access to community kitchens.

With the foundation laid for the community kitchens initiative, including a literature review, policy analysis, and inventory of community kitchens' equipment and usage in PF&R facilities, TPH and PF&R are now working together on next steps to enable community access to kitchens. Some of these next steps include (1) clarifying booking procedures and fees for PF&R kitchens to enable consistency and transparency; (2) working with TPH Health Inspectors to inspect more kitchens in community centres; (3) making a list of community centre kitchens available to the public; and (4) working with the TFPC and TFS on a simple language community kitchens booking toolkit.

### **Community kitchens and adaptive governance**

The TFPC and TFS advocate for a health-focused food system by dedicating resources to community engagement, research, policy and programme development, and advocacy, as well as through supporting pilot projects and facilitating connections across city divisions and community groups. To understand the significance of engaging a wide range of people through these community food and food systems activities, we employ the adaptive governance language and literature. The literature on adaptive governance proposes that to achieve resilience within social organisations and across wider social-ecological systems, in this case, the municipal food system, particular governance attributes are beneficial. These attributes have been identified as resilience indicators or surrogates (Carpenter *et al.* 2005) that are dimensions, observable or unobservable, that either enable resilient social-ecological systems, or that support adaptability and/or transformability of organisations within the system (Folke *et al.* 2010). Three such attributes that can be observed through the work of the TFPC and TFS: *bridging*, *leadership*, and *supporting self-organisation*.

The TFPC and TFS act as bridging agents between the community, community organisations and agencies, and city divisions, staff, and policy-makers. Because of the way that the TFPC and TFS work together with community partners, community-level information is both transferred and translated into the corridors of municipal government. In this process, the TFPC and TFS play the important role of translating community concerns and priorities, so that they can be interpreted in the municipal government environment and can be communicated for policy purposes (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, Carr 2010). When information regarding community activities and food-related dilemmas at the community level are shared at TFPC meetings at City Hall, either by the public or by a TFPC member, the information is relayed to a diverse TFPC membership, participating city councillors, and the city staff being the TFPC coordinator and the TFS team. Between council meetings, the close working relationship of the TFPC and the TFS allows for ideas from the community to form into initiatives. Community kitchens are one example where the TFPC and TFS team bring the interests and concern of community groups into the realm of municipal government, framing community issues as food systems issues relevant to the city and catalysing staff action. Dialogue is now underway among policy-makers within the city to facilitate access to kitchens and increase community kitchen space throughout the city.

Folke *et al.* (2005) explain how key individuals who invoke trusting relationships and provide leadership, vision, and meaning help transform the learning environment in management organisations. The TFPC and TFS, positioned within municipal government, provide and encourage leadership both within the municipal infrastructure and in the wider Toronto community of food practice. First, by focusing on creating an enabling policy environment, the TFPC and TFS not only work directly on the creation of flexible policies, but also foster personal relationships with city staff and community members to create an understanding of food systems issues and advise on policy development. Secondly, the TFPC and TFS are skilled at leveraging resources, thereby expanding the Toronto community of food practice. Thirdly, the TFPC and TFS also bolster community food initiatives like community kitchens by providing support for or reaching out to existing leadership within the community (see Mah and Thang 2013).

Meadows (2008) asserts that the ability to self-organise is the strongest form of system resilience. Self-organisation for a social-ecological system can mean providing opportunities for the emergence of new physical structures or social networks (Folke *et al.* 2005, Meadows 2008). The TFPC and TFS support self-organisation by focusing on activities that enhance access and usability. The priority of the community kitchens initiative is to connect city infrastructure to city users and to identify barriers to equitable access to city resources. The TFS, through related projects and pilots, also augments initiatives with other enabling policy measures and programmes. For example, organising access to food-handler training programmes is one example that complements their community kitchen advocacy, making community members, city infrastructure, and available resources even more compatible.

The TFS and TFPC shape the policy landscape through informal channels by connecting community groups to each other, by helping groups navigate the policy environment on a case-by-case basis (using these experiences as opportunities for both staff and community members to learn more about the food system and its complex governance networks), and by supporting pilot projects. Connections are built between communities and the municipality, self-organisation is promoted and validated, and finally, community leadership is nurtured. This inter-scalar bridging requires forging deliberate connections between communities, agencies and organisations, and city staff across departments, jurisdictions,

scales, and sectors. It is in this way that the attributes of bridging, self-organisation, and leadership are expressed. These activities demonstrate possibility and give a platform to existing motivation, innovation, and creativity within the community.

## Conclusion

The community kitchens policy initiative is an ongoing focus for both the TFPC and TFS, as well as for other community food advocates. TFPC and TFS staff continue to engage multiple city divisions to achieve more enabling community kitchens policy development. Future collaboration will focus on promoting access to available kitchen space for community programming and increasing available kitchen space over time. Central to the work of the TFS team is promoting a health-focused food system connecting across city division and the community to reveal food as an important aspect of the municipal government role. Important to consider is that community kitchens are just one element of an entire repertoire of action that the Food Strategy engages.

Not only does the TFPC and TFS work to shape food policy administratively in the City of Toronto, but just as important is the way the TFPC and TFC interacts and links with community actors in a way that facilitates food hubs and food connections. The TFPC and TFS seek to shape the policy environment not only through official channels, but also through supporting community endeavours. The concept of “hubs”, applied to nodes of organising in inner-city neighbourhoods in a myriad of ways around food, community kitchens being one example, provides useful language to understand the inter-scalar relationships of urban community initiatives. The potential benefits can be viewed in a much more holistic manner. These hubs of activity across the city provide a focal point for neighbourhood engagement, connecting the municipal government to systemic issues, and beyond. Although this is a nascent development in community food organising, the potential forms the foundation for adaptive food governance that could contribute to broader food systems change.

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## Notes

1. Campbell and MacRae (this issue) go further in describing the concept of *community of practice* and its origins.
2. Stroink and Nelson (this issue) also work with and develop this concept of renewal in the food system.
3. The Toronto Food Strategy team has done extensive mapping of the uneven access to health food across the City of Toronto, see website).

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