



May 1, 2018

**Subject : Addressing food issues in your electoral platform**

Dear Candidate:

Congratulations on your candidacy for Ottawa City Council in the upcoming election! The Ottawa Food Policy Council (OFPC) looks forward to hearing more about your proposed platform to support the people of Ottawa, and thanks you for your willingness to undertake the responsibilities of leadership. We would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves as a potential resource, and to ask you to consider how you can demonstrate your commitment to Good Food in your campaign and in your future work as Councillor.

**About the Ottawa Food Policy Council**

OFPC is an independent body that seeks to facilitate discussions on, and elaboration of, local policies impacting food systems. Comprised of individuals representing all aspects of the food system, OFPC is uniquely positioned to provide cross-sectoral input that reflects the citizen voice.

**Our mission** is to have a food system that emphasizes social, economic, and environmental sustainability through the entire food cycle (i.e., from seed to waste) and in which food is celebrated and enjoyed.

**Our work** is guided by the definition of Good Food developed by community stakeholders in Ottawa's **Food for All** project (see Appendix A). Good Food, which we use interchangeably with "high quality food", is fresh, accessible, affordable, culturally relevant, minimally processed, as local as possible, and ecologically grown.

**We believe that access to Good Food for residents within the City of Ottawa should be a priority for City Council candidates.**

A food system includes all aspects of the food cycle, from decisions that are made about food production, through to harvesting, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption, and disposal. **Political decision making should be made through a food systems lens** (see Appendix B). Some topics or policy examples that could improve access to Good Food and are worth examining include:

- Community gardens/edible forests/edible flower boxes
- School gardens
- Backyard chickens
- Urban beekeeping
- School meal programs
- Community kitchens
- City support for sustainable livelihoods (living wage, quality jobs, housing, social/community services, public transportation)
- Local procurement policies within public entities
- Rural/urban linkages
- Farmers' markets
- Comprehensive food literacy programs
- Stopping marketing to kids
- Evaluating and restricting unhealthy products in vending machines in City facilities
- Prioritization of Greenbelt agriculture/rental targeting local markets
- Waste reduction and diversion
- Food safety regulations appropriate to “cottage food” (micro-processing) industry

Beyond specific policy issues, a food systems lens should inform decision making of the City in a holistic way. We would expect careful consideration as to how Good Food and food production are being incorporated into our communities and how our future food systems will be shaped in the future renewal of **Official Plans**.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your campaign priority setting. We will be in touch in the near future to learn of and assess your commitments to Good Food as part of your electoral platform.

You can contact us by email at [info@ofpc-cpao.ca](mailto:info@ofpc-cpao.ca). For more information about OFPC, please refer to [www.ofpc-cpao.ca](http://www.ofpc-cpao.ca).

Sincerely,

Chris Evans  
Chair, Ottawa Food Policy Council

## Appendix A

### Food For All Report

**Our goal is a food system that emphasizes social, economic, and environmental sustainability through the entire food cycle and in which food is celebrated and enjoyed.**

#### **We value social Justice and equity**

##### **Practice:**

- Food systems\* need to be organized in such a way that no person is deprived of access to sufficient nutritious food, either socially, economically or physically.
- The entire community must have a voice in the decisions that shape the food system.
- We work together to address poverty and inequity.

\* A food system includes all aspects of the food cycle, from decisions that are made about food production, through to harvesting, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption, and disposal.

#### **We value health and wellbeing**

##### **Practice:**

- We recognize that healthy, high-quality, nutritious food is the basis for optimal health and wellbeing for all people, in all life stages.

#### **We value social, economic, and environmental sustainability**

##### **Practice:**

- We must enhance and protect biodiversity which is Nature's way of ensuring sustainability.
- We recognize that a diverse spectrum of food choices can support sustainable food systems.
- We emphasize longer-term solutions that seek to remedy underlying problems.
- We support ethical and humane production of food and work to ensure that it is economically viable.
- We work to ensure sustainable livelihoods throughout the food system.

#### **We value social diversity and inclusivity**

##### **Practice:**

- We recognize that available food options must reflect a diversity of needs, of cultures, and of belief systems.

#### **We value education about food and food systems**

##### **Practice:**

- We see food knowledge and skills, including food production and preparation, as a fundamental part of a person's education.
- Personally, we accept responsibility to work towards making our chosen diets more sustainable.
- Collectively, we accept responsibility to acquire and share knowledge to help us change the food system.

### **We value collaboration**

#### **Practice:**

- Our work is based on interdependence, which allows us to collaborate in responding to difficult challenges.
- Everyone has a role to play in this process and leadership can come from any level.
- We seek solutions that consider our whole community, and that build upon existing strengths and resources.
- We work to ensure support is available where needed for individuals and communities to address food issues.

### **We value planning that supports long-term sustainability and ready access to food**

#### **Practice:**

- Food should be integrated into all components of urban and rural planning.
- We need to work towards an “edible landscape”, in which all of our green areas are safe, healthy, and suitable for foraging.
- Everyone who plays a role in providing food for our community should be respected and fairly compensated.

## **Appendix B**

### **Political Decision Making through a Food Systems Lens**

#### **Food policy issues in the City of Ottawa**

A food system includes all aspects of the food cycle, from decisions that are made about food production, through to harvesting, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption, and disposal. **Political decision making should be made through a food systems lens.**

Ottawa residents need a food system that is safe and traceable in which there is tracking of food throughout the supply chain -- from growers and producers to suppliers, processors, brokers, retailers, and regulators -- to enable reductions in contamination response times, and increase fraud prevention (e.g., packaging claims such as “GMO-Free” or “Organic”) and knowledge of place of origin (country of origin or specific farm through initiatives such as Savour Ottawa labelling). This is important to play an active role in shaping their food system through informed decisions, however they need the political leadership to put these tools in place.

**Food access and security is an increasingly important issue** especially at the municipal level resulting from our built environment and zoning policies that shape our food scape. Over the past decade headlines have sounded the alarm that **an increasing number of Canadians are needing to access food banks across the country; this is no exception for Ottawa residents.** This phenomenon has been attributed to numerous factors such as economic inequality, high student debt, the increasingly precarious nature of work, and a growing elderly population on fixed incomes. This increase in food bank usage indicates that greater measures need to be taken to address food accessibility that go beyond simply relying on the markets and charity to feed Ottawa residents.

Canadians have also come to live increasingly in car-dependent communities. With this we have experienced the problem of “food deserts” emerge which is an issue in that people may have access to affordable food, however it is often lacking adequate nutritional value. Food deserts are spaces where those without access to a vehicle find themselves without nutritious food options, like supermarkets. Zoning changes and policies could address food deserts by assisting municipalities and unincorporated regions in developing the infrastructure necessary ensure Ottawa residents have the ability to access locations where good food is available.

**People are struggling to feed their children, independent family farms are struggling to maintain their solvency, and municipalities are struggling to increase public health** all have a stake in food systems design that is fundamentally more critical than large corporations or sector groups wanting to increase their profits. Food related political decision-making therefore is gaining traction and should promote policy coherence and food systems thinking to enable access to healthy food options and sustainable diets.

Additionally, **the current dominant form of food production is unsustainable and has been a significant contributor to climate change.** Some practices in our food system deplete soils, contaminate groundwater and surface waters, and contribute to carbon pollution. The adoption of beneficial management practices throughout the food

system can mitigate these impacts. Local conservation authorities are also raising many red flags about the surrounding environments, protection of watersheds and forest covered areas, of which some issues can be attributed to our dominant food systems. Food policies should establish a supportive environment for social and ecological innovation throughout the food system to help meet climate and environmental protection targets being put in place by other levels of government.

**All citizens have the right to sufficient fresh, healthy and culturally appropriate food, and the right to define their own food and agricultural systems (i.e., food sovereignty).** This right should be exercised at all jurisdictions, but particularly through local and municipal systems. It could also implement initiatives to support increased capacity for local food production and less reliance on imported, southern-grown and -harvested foods.

### **Food policy issues for consideration as a priority for City Council 2018-2022**

Although many of these issues may seem to fall under the jurisdiction of other levels of government, there are ways in which change can be implemented and that leadership at the municipal level can prompt positive food systems change.

**OFPC believes political decision making should take a systems lens to address social, environmental, economic, and health implications of food systems, rather than the current “siloing” of food related issues. Ottawa City Council should take this approach into consideration at every stage of the policy development process that would directly or indirectly affect food systems.** For example, the importance of asking questions about how property tax increases may affect household income and ability to purchase Good Food, but also the ways in which we can incorporate food production into facilities through planning and development. Just as Gender Equality and a Women’s Bureau is being considered by City Council, food systems thinking should be incorporated in policy decision making.

**A large majority of City Council Committees are connected to food systems and should include concrete objectives to address social, environmental, economic, and health. Decision making regarding food in the City of Ottawa goes beyond the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and the Board of Health.** Ottawa food systems are also impacted by decisions made by the Planning Committee through zoning designations, by Community and Protective Services and by By-law and Regulatory Services decisions, as well as by the Finance and Economic Development Committee who allocates the City’s annual budget.

Finally, in the renewal of **Official Plans**, there needs to be careful consideration as to how food and food production are being incorporated into our communities and how our future food systems will be shaped.