

The Role of Local Food in Rural Economic Development



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Literature Review

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1 INTRODUCTION

As of 2016, 54% of the world's population resided in urban areas, with this number estimated to grow by 1.84% each year between 2015 and 2020 (World Health Organization, 2017). The consequences of this gradual mass migration from rural to urban areas has implications for both the remaining rural communities and the agricultural systems that service them. As populations have become more urbanised they have both physically and metaphorically distanced themselves from their food sources (Feenstra, 2002). With respect to Canadian rural agricultural populations, the 2016 Canadian census found that the average farmer in Canada is 55 years of age, and that the largest cohort of existing farmers belongs to the 55 and over age group, with only 9.1% of farmers under the age of 35 (Statistics Canada, 2017). With an ageing farm population and a small number of younger people entering the farming profession, the future of agriculture, food and rural areas remains unclear.

Interestingly, as more people migrate to urban areas the local food movement has simultaneously developed and is gaining momentum. This movement is thought to be driven mainly by youth from various political, cultural, socio-economic and geographical backgrounds (Elton, 2015). These individuals, driven by a common goal, have come together to improve the current food system in light of increasing environmental and social challenges (Elton, 2015). What started as a grassroots movement in the early 2000's has influenced the development of provincial and national policies for local food with Ontario enacting *The Local Food Act* in 2013 while the Canadian federal government is currently consulting with the public on a national food policy.

With increasing attention being paid to the further development and support of local food systems, many have posited that the local food movement is a viable means for rural revitalization (Feenstra, 2002; Phillips & Wharton, 2015; Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). The re-emerging popularity of farmers' markets, coupled with the development of various direct marketing endeavours including community supported agriculture (CSA), farm-to-table establishments and food hubs provide opportunities for increased farm profitability, which in turn can create more vibrant and self-sustaining rural economies (AMO, 2013; Mount et. al,

2013; OMAFRA, 2016; Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008; Tovey, 2009). However, several challenges have been identified for local food systems and their long term economic feasibility (AMO, 2013; Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini, & Schlegel, 2010; Feenstra, 1997; Mount, 2012; O’Hara & Pirog, 2013). These challenges must be further examined when considering the viability of local food systems and their implications for the future of rural areas.

1.1 Overview

This literature review initially examines the motivations for the growth of the local food movement and the creation of various direct marketing initiatives. The development of policy with regard to the promotion of local food is then explored. The contentious issue of defining ‘local food’ is evaluated from various perspectives, followed by defining what constitutes a ‘food hub’. The economic impacts of local food systems are discussed followed by an examination of the challenges and opportunities identified for local food systems. To provide context, existing case studies from eastern and northern Ontario are evaluated.

2 EVOLVING FOOD SYSTEMS

For the developed world, the globalised food system has provided an abundant variety of food but at a significant cost to the environment, smaller producers, the health of consumers and rural areas (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Kneen, 1995; La Trobe & Acott, 2000; O’Kane, 2016; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). The current food system, as O’Kane (2016) states, “disconnects consumers from where, how and by whom food is grown” (p.218). In order to meet global food demands, agricultural systems have progressively grown more mechanized, industrialized and reliant on unsustainable transportation systems, which in turn has negatively influenced smaller farm businesses (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; La Trobe & Acott, 2000). In the current globalised system, smaller family farms are increasingly unable to compete as they cannot reach the economies of scale of their agri-business competitors (La Trobe & Acott, 2000). These agri-businesses are also often recipients of commodity subsidies, furthering their competitive advantage and the inequalities that smaller producers encounter (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). Cheap food imports and the existing disconnect between

consumers and producers has created a culture and expectation of cheap food in North America (Mount, 2012). La Trobe & Acott (2000), report that farmers now receive “a share of only 10 to 20% of the product value, compared with half a century ago when at least 50% was returned to the farmer and rural community” (p.311). As such, one of the major criticisms of the current food system is that agricultural profits are concentrated in multi-national corporations instead of rural communities (Andrée, Ballamingie & Sinclair-Waters, 2015; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Ironically, the globalized food system which was designed to provide abundant inexpensive food to North Americans has contributed to an obesity epidemic, food insecurity, food safety concerns and the advent of food deserts (Marsden & Franklin, 2013; Pothukucchi, Joseph, Burton & Fisher, 2002; Sitaker, Kolodinsky, Pitts & Sequin, 2014).

In response to the growing concerns regarding the globalised food system, many are working to create decentralized, sustainable and fair alternatives (Andrée, Ballamingie & Sinclair-Waters, 2015; Feenstra, 2002; Franklin, Loudon & MacRae, 2010; Newton and McEntee, 2011; Mount, 2012; Selfa & Qazi, 2005; Sumner, McMurtry & Renglich, 2014). They are typified as being more environmentally sustainable and economically viable (Feenstra, 2002; Sumner, McMurtry & Renglich, 2014). These alternative local food systems emphasize the importance of place, by encouraging transparent interactions to build trust and understanding, while also fostering dialogue to reconnect consumers to those who grow and raise their food (Feenstra, 2002; Mount, 2012). Those advocating for alternative food systems share an understanding that local food is central to healthy ecosystems, communities, economies and lives (Food Secure Canada, 2011). Mount (2012) notes that “the fundamental principles of local food systems must surely include the (a) reconnection of producer to consumer; (b) the direct exchange through which this occurs, and (c) the shared goals and values that underlie the system” (p.110). As a growing number of North American consumers continue to place more emphasis on the freshness, taste and experience of food, this provides growing opportunities for smaller producers which, in turn, can revitalize rural economies (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Friedmann, 2007; Loudon & MacRae, 2010; Miller, 2010). To ensure that alternative food

systems are successful, it is vital that the social relations entrenched in the local area are nurtured (Selfa & Qazi, 2005).

2.1 The Local Food Movement

The local food movement has gained support across North America and Europe, with Ontario's movement having its origins tied to early 20th century farming practices (Elton, 2015; Franklin, Newton & McEntee, 2011). However, this grassroots movement began to gain real momentum in the early 21st century; It has been likened to the 'back to the land' movement of the 1960's and the health food movement of the 1970's and 1980's. These were also times when concerned citizens began questioning the role of corporations in the North American food system (Elton, 2015). The movement was perpetuated by the timely publishing of a few key books such as *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *The 100-Mile Diet* (Elton, 2015). The term 'locavore' was defined by the Oxford dictionary in 2007, which seemed to bring mainstream awareness to the local food movement (Hayes, 2013). The movement can be defined by its diverse advocates such as locavore groups, farm-to-school programs, and chefs and restaurants that promote seasonal eating and provide farm-to-table dining experiences (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Elton, 2015; Hayes, 2013). The movement does have its critics who claim that low-income consumers are unable to participate; however, community cooperatives and programs have been developed to provide better access to local food for these marginalized groups (Franklin, Newton & McEntee, 2011). The local food movement in Ontario will continue to grow as: more consumers place importance on knowing the origins of their food; access to fresher and more regionally authentic food is readily available; and consumers become more aware of the benefits of supporting local producers and retaining their food dollars in the local economy (Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008; Friedman, 2007).

2.2. New Ways to Access Food

Within the globalised food system, the motivations for supermarket usage by consumers' rests with the notions of efficiency, convenience, cost and speed of attaining food (O'Kane, 2016; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008). Consumers have become so disassociated with their food that they rarely contemplate the origins of the products that they are

purchasing and consuming (Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008). However, with the advent of the local food movement, the slow food movement has also developed in response to changing consumer behaviours. Similarly, the slow food movement aims to support smaller producers and protect the environment, while also placing an emphasis on the joy of cooking, eating and sharing meals (Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Through these movements, consumers are gaining an appreciation for producers and the quality food that they grow, while also establishing productive relationships (Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008).

Several alternative avenues by which consumers can access local food have been developed in response to the growing recognition of the benefits of consuming local food (La Trobe & Acott, 2000; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Feenstra (1997) states that “a logical and appropriate way to revitalize a community is by the development of a local food economy” (p.99). Therefore, the notion of place is at the root of local food activities (Feenstra, 1997; La Trobe & Acott, 2000). The variety of local food networks currently utilized by consumers include community gardens, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers’ markets, roadside stands, farm-to-table restaurants, pick-your-own enterprises and food hubs (O’Kane, 2016). These avenues are increasing access to nutritious food, while also educating the public on their ‘foodsheds’. Perhaps more importantly, these avenues are creating a trust and understanding between consumers and producers (O’Kane, 2016; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008). The growth of the local food movement can also be attributed to attracting new farmers to the profession as demand for local food increases (Mount et al., 2013).

Of the local food initiatives, the farmers’ market is the most established, with food hubs being the least (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Phillips & Wharton, 2015; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008). When consumers were asked about their motivations for attending farmers’ markets, the most frequent response was that they wanted to support their local farming community (La Trobe & Acott, 2000; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008). Other motivations included that consumers felt that food purchased at the farmers’ market was of higher quality and freshness than that in the grocery store, that consumers value the social interaction with the producers, and that the interactions allow them to make informed food purchase decisions (Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008).

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) originated in Japan in the late 1960s, and is another local food initiative that directly links consumers to producers (Starr & Adams, 2003). CSAs allow consumers to directly support growers by paying for a share in the farm at the beginning of the growing season and in return they receive a basket of farm products each week. By paying for a share at the beginning of the growing season, the consumer accepts the risks and reaps the rewards of the harvest, while also securing income for the farmers (La Trobe & Acott, 2000; Starr & Adams, 2003).

3 PLANNING FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Local food systems generate numerous environmental, social and economic benefits for communities (Feenstra, 2002; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015; Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). As such, there is growing recognition of the vital role that government policy can play to promote local food systems (Feenstra, 1997; Sharp, Jackson-Smith & Smith, 2016). Planning for local food is central to improving public health and strengthening local economic development in both rural and urban communities (Feenstra, 2002; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015; Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). To ensure the development of a successful local food system, planners must consider a diversity of issues including farmland loss, location of distribution centers, urban and rural food access, and agricultural land-use pollution issues (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Born & Purcell (2006) caution that planners must avoid the 'local trap' which is the assumption that local is innately beneficial. To do so, planners must consider strategies and policies for local food at all scales, as national and regional strategies can also generate a more integrated, collaborative food system (Born & Purcell, 2006). Despite the importance of a top-down approach to local food system development, many have recognized that communities and individuals play a vital role in promoting the consumption of local food (Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015).

3.1 The Municipal Role, Food Policy Councils

There is growing recognition amongst lower-tier governments of the important role they can play in addressing food insecurity and public health issues in their jurisdictions by supporting local, sustainable agriculture (Feenstra, 1997). One common approach that has

emerged is the development of food policy councils (FPC). Successful FPC's typically have a supportive mayor, engaged municipal staff and a representative public presence (Feenstra, 1997; Sharp, Jackson-Smith & Smith, 2016). Municipalities and regions that have well organized FPC's typically have programs and policies in place to support local food systems, which translates to more local food and agricultural activities occurring in their areas (AMO, 2013; Sharp, Jackson-Smith & Smith, 2016). Collaborative efforts between various stakeholders and municipal policy-makers is vital to the creation of successful local food networks (AMO, 2013; Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). It is through the FPCs that improvements to community health can be made by increasing access to local, healthy foods via the development of initiatives such as community gardens and farmers' markets. To assist in the promotion of local food systems, the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) created a guide: *Best Practices in Local Food: A Guide for Municipalities*. The guide outlines best practices that align with provincial priorities and legislation (AMO, 2013). AMO suggests that to best support the development and long-term viability of local food networks, municipalities should develop a food policy council, a food charter, and amend their Official Plans to generate land-use planning goals and zoning by-laws that promote local food networks (AMO, 2013).

As lower-tier municipalities typically have limited resources available to dedicate to new programming, the collaborative efforts of FPCs are vital to the development of local food networks (Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). However, it has also been noted that, due to this lack of resources and human capital, many FPCs have narrow objectives and tend to focus on singular issues such as the development of a food charter or a county-level food systems plan (Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015). Given the democratic structure of FPCs, the implementation of municipal-level food policy can also be significantly influenced by the political motivations of certain stakeholders. However, the advocacy role of FPCs is still crucial to the development of local food systems, regardless of scope (Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015).

One example of a burgeoning food policy council is the Greater Sudbury Food Policy Council (GSFPC). The Sudbury and District Health Unit and the City of Greater Sudbury sanctioned the City of Greater Sudbury Food Charter in 2004 (GSFPC, 2014). Through the charter, the GSFPC is mandated to "support the development of this equitable, vibrant and

sustainable food system for the City of Greater Sudbury through research, advocacy and the dissemination of knowledge of food issues and to foster collaboration and communication amongst other food system stakeholders including business, community organizations, individuals and government” (GSFPC, 2014, para 4). Since the Charters’ inception in 2004, several community initiatives have been created to support the development of local food networks in the region including the Eat Local Sudbury Co-operative, community gardens, the Sudbury & District Good Food Box program and the Agricultural Reserve (GSFPC, 2014). As more local food needs and opportunities have been identified for the City of Greater Sudbury, the GSFPC was developed to create a more coordinated effort to address these needs.

3.2 The Provincial Role, The Local Food Act

Ontario is the largest and most diverse food-producing region in Canada, producing over 200 different agricultural crops on 52,000 farms, accounting for 1 in 9 jobs in the province (Wales, 2012). In 2013, Ontario’s Premier announced the enactment of the provincial Local Food Act. This legislation is intended to create more jobs and boost the agri-food industry by increasing the demand for Ontario-grown food (OMAFRA, 2015). The Local Food Act serves many purposes including: educating Ontarians about the interconnections between health, food and Ontario agriculture; encouraging healthy eating habits; increasing public awareness of food and farming in Ontario; increasing demand for local food through government purchasing; improving the economic viability of farming, processing and distribution of food; promoting local food network development by connecting various stakeholders in Ontario’s agri-food industry, and improving local food availability for all Ontarians, especially the food insecure (Castrilli, Dunne & Bell- Pasht, 2013). This legislation recognizes the importance of collaboration between public and private sectors in order to continue to grow Ontario’s local food systems (Local Food Act, 2013). As a result of this collaboration with farmers, processors, consumers, retailers, foodservice providers and not-for-profit organizations, the province developed a local food strategy aimed at increasing the availability of local food for Ontario consumers (OMAFRA, 2016).

In the 2015/2016 fiscal year alone, the province invested over \$21 million in 150 projects to promote local food in Ontario (OMAFRA, 2016). To increase food literacy, the Local Food Act also deemed the first week of June each year as Local Food Week (OMAFRA, 2016). An annual local food report is also published by the Minister of Agriculture, which details the goals set and met in the year and also highlights Ontario local food champions (Local Food Act, 2013). Foodland Ontario, which is the provincial consumer promotion program established in 1977, continues to promote Ontario local food by educating families about seasonal vegetables and connecting them to eating seasonally with delicious recipes (OMAFRA, 2015). Through the work of Foodland Ontario, it is reported that 81% of shoppers can identify Ontario-grown fruit and vegetables in grocery stores (OMAFRA, 2016). The Local Food Fund was established in 2013 as a three-year initiative with available funding of \$10 million a year to support job creation and attract investment in Ontario's agri-food industry (OMAFRA, 2016). In that three-year period, over 130 grants were distributed, which significantly boosted the growth of local food economies across the province (OMAFRA, 2016). Although the Local Food Fund is complete, the province continues to promote local food initiatives through funding programs such as *Growing Forward 2*, the *Greenbelt Fund*, and the *Ontario Trillium Foundation* (OMAFRA, 2016).

3.3 The Federal Role, A Food Policy for Canada

Elton (2015) suggests that there is a saying within the local food movement that "you can vote with your fork" (para. 18). However, organizations such as the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and Food Secure Canada indicate that a successful local food system is more a creation of federal policy (Elton, 2015; Wales, 2012). Given the growing success of the local food movement, both of these organizations have created national food policies and strategies. The CFA created the *National Food Strategy*, which details how the agri-food industry and the federal government can collaborate to continue to increase the health of Canadians by encouraging the procurement and utilization of Ontario grown and processed products (Wales, 2012). Food Secure Canada spent three years creating the *People's Food Policy* which is an extensive document created by 3,500 local food stakeholders from diverse backgrounds (Food Secure Canada, 2011). The policy was developed to guide the federal government to create a national food system that is equitable and sustainable (Elton, 2015). The root of the policy

identifies seven pillars for Canadian food sovereignty: 1- focuses on food for people; 2- values food providers; 3-localizes food systems; 4-puts control locally; 5- builds knowledge and skills; 6- works with nature; and 7- recognizes that food is sacred (Food Secure Canada, 2011). The vision of the *People's Food Policy* is to create a food system where every Canadian can access affordable, healthy food and that Canadian producers are fairly compensated for growing safe and nutritious food (Food Secure Canada, 2011).

In early 2017, the Canadian federal government announced that it is in the process of developing a national food policy (Government of Canada, 2017). The government is currently asking Canadians for their input regarding the development of this national policy, specifically relating to four identified themes: 1- increasing access to affordable food; 2-improving health and food safety; 3-conserving our soil, water and air; and 4- growing more high-quality food (ibid). The Canadian Food Policy “will set a long-term vision for the health, environmental, social, and economic goals related to food, while identifying actions we can take in the short-term” (ibid, para. 1). Emerging leadership at the federal level illustrates the promise of continued growth for the local food movement.

4 DEFINING ‘LOCAL’

The concept of ‘local’ is evolving with no consensus on a clear meaning as various stakeholders (producers, retailers and consumers) attempt to generate their own definitions (CFIA, 2014; Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Selfa & Qazi, 2005; Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008; Trivette, 2015). As Selfa & Qazi (2005) ask, “Is the choice to engage in a local food system a matter of proximity (place), a matter of food quality (taste), or a matter of reconnecting with farmers (face-to-face)?” (p.452). A variety of definitions have been suggested in the literature, most of which are influenced by geographical or political boundaries (CFIA, 2014; Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). However, more holistic approaches to the definition have been proposed that focus on the importance of personal connections and the relational aspects of participating in local food systems (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Trivette, 2015).

4.1 Regulatory Definitions

From a regulatory standpoint, distance would appear to be at the root of the definition of 'local'. Federally, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) recently adopted an interim policy that recognizes 'local' as: *food produced in the province or territory in which it is sold, or food sold across provincial borders within 50 km of the originating province or territory* (CFIA, 2014). Under their previous policy, 'local' was recognized as: *food that originated within a 50-km radius of the place where it was sold or, food sold that originated within the same local government unit or adjacent government unit* (CFIA, 2014). In Ontario, the *Local Food Act* defines 'local food' as (a) *food produced or harvested in Ontario, including forest or freshwater food, and (b) subject to any limitations in the regulations, food and beverages made in Ontario if they include ingredients produced or harvested in Ontario* (Local Food Act, 2013). In Canada, labelling products as 'local' is voluntary and the CFIA encourages that products labelled as such include further distinguishing information such as the name of the products' place of origin (CFIA, 2014). These regulatory definitions have been criticised as being too general and broad (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Hinrichs, 2003; Tovey, 2009; Trivette, 2015). Conversely, there has been expressed concern over a definition that may be too narrow in scope, such as a bioregional definition. When utilizing this definition, if the producer or consumer is located near the border of a bioregion with limited local availability of products, this creates a level of difficulty of supporting 'local' if the closest market is located in an adjacent bioregion (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010).

4.2 The Diversity of Defining 'Local'

Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel (2010), note that utilizing 'food miles' alone for a definition of local is insufficient if notions of transparency, social justice and sustainability are to be incorporated. They suggest that a more comprehensive definition should include the interpersonal connections of all participants in the local food system. When examining the definition of local, it is imperative to consider that the definition varies depending on the role of the participant in the local food system (Trivette, 2015). Several studies have been conducted on the consumer definition of local; however, there have been few that report from the

retailers' perspectives (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Trivette, 2015). Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel (2010) found significant disparities in how retailers generate their definitions of local. Some retailers stated that availability of local products and customer values influence their definition, whereas others noted that their definition is one that is easiest for them to use (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010). Interestingly, some retailers consider that food processed in the area but not grown in the area is local due to the economic implications (job creation) for the local community (Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010).

Trivette (2015) divides the definition of local into two categories: *local by proximity* and *local by relationship*. Similar to the regulatory definition of local, *local by proximity* uses distance measures to define local whether it is a numerical distance (100 miles) or a political boundary (Trivette, 2015). Factors that are considered in the proximity definition include seasonality impacts on local production and access to markets. The *local by relationship* definition relies on the personal connections that retailers have with producers, which is more difficult to quantify (Tovey, 2009; Trivette, 2015). Factors that are considered in the relationship definition are the size of the sourced farming operations and the number of relationships that a retailer has with local producers. The more connections to local producers a retailer has, the more 'local' they are thought to be (Trivette, 2015). Consumers tend to incorporate freshness, taste and quality of products in their definition of local compared to producers and retailers (Trivette, 2015). Selfa & Qazi (2005) investigated the producer definition of local and found that 'bartering between farmers' was considered local, even if the farmer with whom they were bartering was from a distant area, hence placing more emphasis on relationship over distance. However, generally producers defined local in terms of proximate distances and the direct connections to their consumers (Selfa & Qazi, 2005). The work of Foodland Ontario in branding Ontario-grown products was noted to potentially weaken the definition of local as consumers identified with the province-wide brand over their potentially more regionalized definitions (Smithers, Lamarche & Joseph, 2008).

4.3 Certifying 'Local', Local Food Plus

Local Food Plus (LFP) is a non-profit organization that was established in 2006 to assist producers who were struggling to market their locally-produced goods (Campbell & MacRae, 2013). LFP serves many purposes, one of which is to provide an area for buyers and sellers of local food to meet and to create new markets for local goods. LFP has created a set of standards to certify local, sustainable producers and processors while simultaneously developing partnerships with institutions, restaurants and retailers looking to source local products (Campbell & MacRae, 2013). LFP recognizes the contentious nature of the definition of 'local'; however, aligning with provincial regulations, LFP currently defines local as "lying within provincial boundaries" (Louden & MacRae, 2010, p.180). Louden & MacRae (2010) note,

Sustainably produced food is not truly sustainable unless it is also local (with some exceptions for products that we cannot grow here, but are embedded in our culture, such as coffee). Local ensures that the food has not traveled great distances, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with long distance transportation" (p. 181).

LFP believes that local food can build urban and rural connections, while also providing an avenue for rural revitalization where farmers are able to make a living. Regardless of the scale or interpretation of local, the benefits and underlying values of the term are seemingly consistent.

5 WHAT IS A 'FOOD HUB'?

Similar to the definition of local, there is no widespread consensus on a singular definition of what constitutes a 'food hub' (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Franklin, Newton & McEntee, 2011; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). The structure and functions of food hubs are highly variable and thus no singular definition can capture the variety of purposes they serve (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Franklin, Newton & McEntee, 2011; Horst et al., 2016). As Rich Pirog of Michigan State University's Center for Regional Food Systems has stated "if you have seen one food hub, you have seen one food hub!" (Phillips & Wharton, 2015, p.136). However, the National Food Hub Collaboration provides a definition that appears to be accepted among many scholars. It defines a 'food hub' as "a business or organisation that actively manages the

aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand” (Phillips & Wharton, 2015, p.134-135). From a social and ecological perspective, food hubs are also defined as providing easier access to local, healthy food for all consumers, while allowing producers to grow sustainable crops for a fair wage (Horst et al., 2016; Franklin, Newton & McEntee, 2011). Similarly, Blay-Palmer et al. (2013) define a food hub as “a network of grassroots, community-based organisations and individuals that work together to build increasingly socially just, economically robust and ecologically sound food systems that connect farmers with consumers as directly as possible” (p. 524). Berti & Mulligan (2016) examined the literature and classified the existing definitions of food hubs into two categories: a values-based agri-food supply chain typology and a sustainable food community development typology. As this literature review is concerned with the rural economic development implications of local food, the definitions in the values-based agri-food supply chain typology, as shown in Table 1, were explored.

Food hubs exist as non-profit organizations, privately-held food hubs, cooperatives and publicly-held food hubs (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Rogoff, 2014). Regardless of the legal business structure, it is essential that a food hub adapts to the needs of its community to ensure its long-term viability (Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Food hubs typically work with 40 producers or less and mainly distribute their aggregated products to restaurants, small grocery stores and institutional food services (Franklin, Newton & McEntee, 2011; Phillips & Wharton, 2015; Sitaker, Kolodinsky, Pitts & Seguin, 2014). As food hubs are a newly developed concept, little has been concluded about their tangible social and economic impacts (Phillips & Wharton, 2015).

Table 1- Berti & Mulligan's (2016) Assemblage of Food Hub Definitions

Values-Based Agri-Food Supply Chain Food Hub Definitions	
Morely et al. (2008)	FH is a mechanism by which small producers can collectively access a middleman facility that enables them to trade with large customers – be they supermarkets, food service vendors or public procurement consortia – that none of them would be able to trade with by acting alone.
Barnham et al. (2012), referred in Bloom and Hinrichs (2011), Woods et al. (2013), Clark and Inwood (2015), and Klein (2015)	FH is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.
Matson and Thayer (2013)	FH is a way to connect multiple producers to mid- and large-scale wholesale purchasers as well as individual customers more efficiently. The food hub concept has blossomed and has emerged as a logistical vehicle that facilitates a local food supply chain.
Fischer et al. (2015)	FHs are, or intend to be, financially viable businesses that demonstrate a significant commitment to place through aggregation and marketing of regional food.
Cleveland et al. (2014)	Local FHs are a means of aggregating and distributing food by pooling food products from a number of smaller farms and delivering them to grocery stores, schools, hospitals and restaurants.
Reynolds-Allie et al. (2013)	A food hub is a business or organization that actively coordinates aggregation, storage, distribution, and marketing of locally- or regionally-produced food to strengthen small producers' abilities to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demands. By aggregating the products of many individual farmers and providing economies of scale, food hubs help small producers reach a wider range of markets, including regional buyers.

5.1 Benefits

Although farmers' markets are a well-established means of marketing locally-produced goods, they are not the most economically viable option for producers as sales are somewhat dependent on the weather, which influences market attendance, as well as competing community events. Producers also often have to pay a market membership fee and a wage for

an individual to vend (Barnham et al., 2012). CSA's are less risky than selling at a farmers' market; however, they have a limited scope and have high turnover rates (Barnham et al., 2012). Food hubs exist as non-profit or for-profit organizations that have the ability to amass locally- and regionally-grown food from a network of several different producers simultaneously (Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Food hubs have the infrastructure in place to store and transport locally-grown goods, which allows producers to work together to meet the demands of restaurants and grocery stores that they would not be able to meet individually (Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Through this network of producers, food hubs can distribute larger volumes of locally grown food than farmers' markets or CSA programs (Friedmann, 2007; Jablonski, Schmit & Kay, 2016; Morley, Morgan & Morgan, 2008; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Food hubs are multi-functional and work on both the demand and supply side of local food. Food hubs work with producers regarding sustainable growing practices, production planning, season extension, packaging, branding, certification and food safety (Barnham et al., 2012; Fischer, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). By providing access to year-round markets, aggregated processing and networking opportunities, food hubs have the potential to improve the economic viability of smaller farming operations (Barnham et al., 2012; Hardesty & Leff, 2010; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Food hubs also create conditions for more local food procurement which can generate business taxes and create jobs associated with the food hub, but also along the supply chain as well (Fischer, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). A recent food hub feasibility study estimated that a food hub operating at capacity could create 400 jobs and add an additional \$60 million into the local economy of southern Wisconsin (Fisher, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). Producers involved in food hubs have reported that their farm sales have increased by 25%, which has influenced 60% of those existing food hub producers to expand their operations (Fisher, Pirog & Hamm, 2015).

5.2 Challenges

Food hub operators cite several challenges including: difficulties in balancing supply and demand, meeting buyer specifications, maintaining farm identity along the supply chain, price sensitivity, access to capital, seasonal fluctuations, and managing growth (AMO, 2013; Fisher, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). Fisher, Pirog & Hamm (2015) note that the median age of an

economically-viable food hub is 9.5 years. Food hubs that have been in operation for 5 years cited that they were not yet economically viable as they needed to continually invest in additional infrastructure (trucks, cold storage) in the early stages of their operations to manage their growth (Fischer, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). Food hubs struggle with their long-term economic viability as access to capital in their formative years is limited for both the operating costs of the food hub, but also for their producers (Fischer, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). Food hubs also rely heavily on volunteer labour and in-kind support, and struggle with finding reliable seasonal and part-time staff, which does not bode well for their long-term financial stability (Fischer, Pirog & Hamm, 2015). To combat these challenges, food hubs would benefit from additional avenues by which to access capital, business development and strategies tailored to the food hub model, and wider stakeholder engagement (AMO, 2013; Barnham et al., 2012; Fischer, Pirog & Hamm, 2015).

5.3 Governance

Berti & Mulligan (2016) note that unlike cooperatives, food hubs exemplify:

..a different business model based on the principle of strategic co-opetition and it corresponds to a different hybrid organisational arrangement, namely the strategic network or strategic alliance because they are inherently profit-driven and not driven by the principle of solidarity and mutual aid that are at the core of the cooperative (p. 629).

In their guide to evaluating food hubs, Nelson & Landman (2015) stress the importance of clearly establishing the goals of the community food hub with all stakeholders involved.

Figure 1 illustrates common themes in which community food hub goals may be categorized.

Mount (2012) notes that at the core of local food governance is reconnection, direct exchange and shared goals and values. Given the diversity of local food hub operations, it is important to note that governance among food hubs will also vary depending on their legal business structure.

Figure 1- Nelson & Landman's (2015) Common themes for organizing CFH goals

Mount (2012) states that, given the inherent collaborative nature of food hubs, there is potential for transparent and receptive governance while also maintaining the advantages of having direct relationships in the scaling up of production. The dissemination of economic power among food hub stakeholders is unique. Food producers, who are often in the 'price taker' position in commodity markets, are given more power in food hubs as they are often in a 'price setter' or 'price negotiator' position (Berti & Mulligan, 2016). Aside from aggregation and distribution, at the core of food hubs is the development of transparent and cooperative relationships along the value chain (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Sumner, McMurtry & Renglich, 2014). It is through clear communication and trust that the success of food hubs continues to grow.

6 FOOD SYSTEMS AND RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As consumer demand for local food continues to grow, the economic opportunities for rural areas are becoming increasingly recognized (AMO, 2013; Caldwell & Marr, 2013; Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013; Hardesty & Leff, 2010; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). The existence of small family farms is vital to maintaining the economic and social viability of rural communities (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Breustedt & Glauben, 2007). The local food movement is offering rural areas a way of diversifying their economies through a variety of emerging 'farm-to-fork' initiatives including: CSAs, farmers' markets, box schemes, food hubs, u-pick operations, farm gate sales, farmer collectives and agritourism (Berti & Mulligan, 2016). These initiatives are not only economically beneficial to farmers, but also for others who participate in

the local food network, including restaurants, retailers and tourism operators (Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013). The Waterloo Region conducted an agricultural economic impact study that found that “..for every job in the region’s agriculture sector, four additional jobs are supported in the economy” (AMO, 2013, p.5). The multiplier effect is also especially strong in supporting local food, given that “when a consumer purchases a local food item from a farmers’ market, the farmer retains a greater share of the food dollar and is more likely to spend the money on local employees who in turn spend their earnings locally” (AMO, 2013, p.5).

It has been suggested that rural communities that have diversified economies and well established networks among community stakeholders are more resilient (Caldwell & Marr, 2013; Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Murdoch, 2000). The Northeast community network (NeCN) in northern Ontario is a non-profit, incorporated, regional organization that is comprised of 17 diverse members that promote regional economic development (Caldwell & Marr, 2013; NeCN, 2017). The NeCN has recognized the opportunities for agricultural expansion in the north as a means for diversifying northern rural economies. Municipalities and private enterprises have also acknowledged the potential of local food for rural economic development and are progressively promoting the development of local food initiatives (AMO, 2013; Jablonski, Schmit & Kay, 2016).

The emergence of ‘creative food clusters’ that are typified by culinary and agri-tourism ventures is another avenue by which rural communities are diversifying their economies through local food (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Rural communities are beginning to use the localization of food as a branding tool for place-based rural development (Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). As food is directly linked to culture, many rural areas are rediscovering and sharing their distinct food cultures with tourists through food tours, festivals and farm visits (Feenstra, 1997; Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). In response to concerns regarding the globalised food system, consumers are demanding more information regarding “who feeds us and how the food is processed” (Phillips & Wharton, 2015, p.54). Not only do consumers want to support local through their purchasing habits, there is also an increasing demand for a reconnection to food through experiential forms of tourism (Lee, Wall & Kovacs, 2015; Phillips & Wharton,

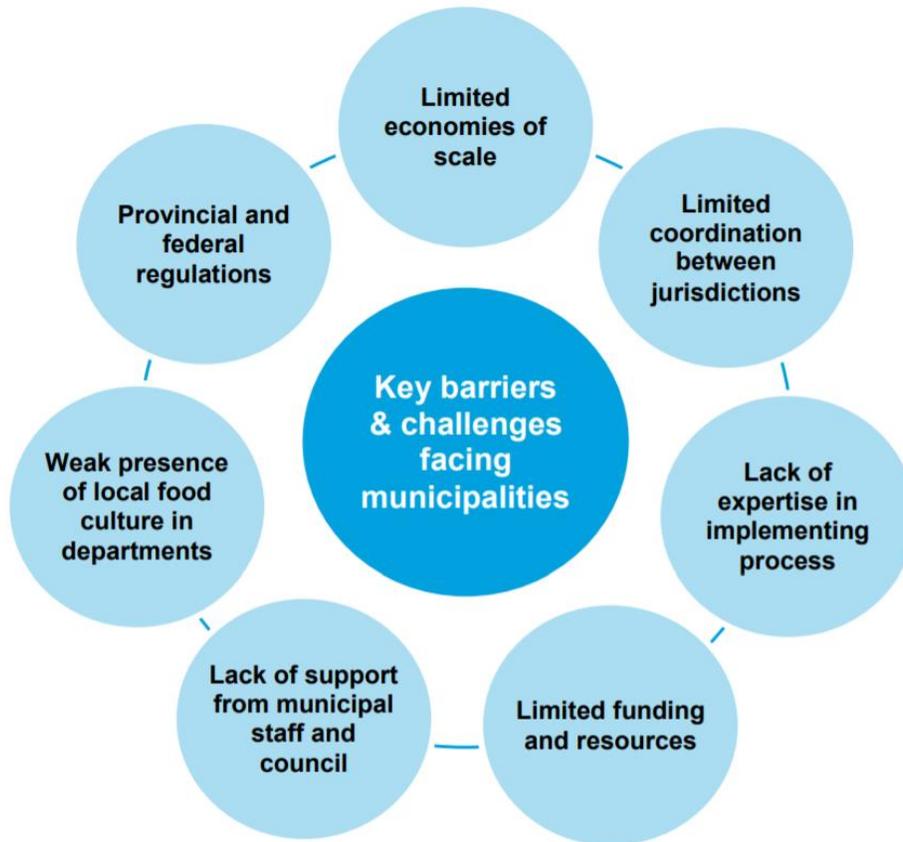
2015). Given the diversity of local food initiatives being utilized by rural communities, the potential for rural revitalization seems promising.

6.1 Challenges

Despite the burgeoning support for local food, numerous challenges with respect to the long term economic viability of local food systems have been identified by all local food stakeholders. Given the inherent nature of rural areas, the lack of human capital, distances to urban markets and lack of local processing and distribution infrastructure have been identified as significant barriers to sustaining local food systems (AMO, 2013; Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Feenstra, 1997; Miller, 2010; Mount et al., 2013). Despite the ongoing efforts by Foodland Ontario, significant challenges still exist with regard to consumers' lack of education and awareness around food issues (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Mount et al., 2013). As previously discussed, the absence of a commonly recognized definition of 'local' and labelling of such products is also a barrier for consumers in identifying local products (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015).

Municipalities have identified several obstacles for the long-term viability of local food systems which are summarized in Figure 2 below. Municipal land use planners are often faced with planning policies created to protect rural lands from fragmentation that inadvertently discourage the creation of smaller farms (AMO, 2013; Miller, 2010). Producers looking to vertically integrate by creating on-farm processing are also often discouraged by municipal zoning, as property taxes significantly increase with land use changes (AMO, 2013; Miller, 2010). Municipalities also identified a shortage of available funding and resources to support local food initiatives as a significant challenge (AMO, 2013, Miller, 2010).

Figure 2- AMO's (2013) Key Barriers & Challenges facing Municipalities



The absence of stable, long-term funding is a commonly identified challenge for local food initiatives, as they are often operated by contract positions that are heavily dependent on federal and provincial grants (AMO, 2013; Berti & Mulligan, 2016, Miller, 2010). Another commonly identified challenge is the lack of collaboration and innate competition between various local food initiatives (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). It appears that many local food initiatives operate in ‘silos’ given that they are in direct competition for limited provincial and federal funding (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). As one local food stakeholder remarked “I would like to see an opportunity for us to integrate...I see lots of duplication of services that we could probably do better and more effectively if we worked together” (Mount et al., 2013, p.598). It was also noted that local food initiatives operating in rural areas are heavily reliant on volunteers and that volunteer ‘burnout’ is common (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015).

Restaurants and smaller retailers have also identified challenges of sourcing from local producers (Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). The logistics of working with a variety of farmers to attain the consistency, quantity and quality of products required to meet consumer needs was identified as a significant challenge, as well as negotiating a fair price (Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013; Mount et al., 2013; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). Retailers note that the prices set by the commodity market make it difficult to price locally-produced goods fairly (Dougherty, Brown & Green, 2013). Consumer preferences were also noted as a challenge, as it was observed that urban customers were more willing to pay a premium for local food than local, rural customers (Mount et al., 2013).

Many challenges exist for producers of local food. The subsidization of the commodity market has been a detriment to the livelihoods of smaller producers, who live with ongoing price volatility and are unable to reach the economies of scale to compete (Sadler, Arku & Gilliland, 2015; Mount et al., 2013). At the same time, many small producers do not want to scale up as they want a fair price for their quality, small batch products. As was previously identified, the lack of options to access capital and the lack of existing infrastructure for processing and distribution are also barriers for local food producers (AMO, 2013; Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Dunne, Chambers, Giombolini & Schlegel, 2010; Feenstra, 1997; Miller, 2010; Mount, 2012; Mount et al., 2013). Producers interested in scaling-up their operations to meet the growing demand for local food face the challenges of balancing supply and demand and accessing appropriate markets to distribute their goods (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Selfa, & Qazi, 2005).

6.2 Opportunities

Support for local food is growing (Andrée, Ballamingie & Sinclair-Waters, 2015; Elton, 2015; Feenstra, 2002; Franklin, Loudon & MacRae, 2010; Newton & McEntee, 2011; Mount, 2012; Rikkonen et al., 2013; Selfa & Qazi, 2005; Sumner, McMurtry & Renglich, 2014). As consumers continually seek ways to reconnect with their food, local food initiatives will have support (Rikkonen et al., 2013). At the community level, local food champions and food entrepreneurs are developing creative ways to meet the demand for local food (Berti &

Mulligan, 2016; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). The work of organizations, such as Foodland Ontario, to educate consumers on food issues will further generate support for local food (Mount et al., 2013; Rikkonen et al., 2013). Feenstra (1997), notes that public participation is vital for the viability of local food systems, and that an educated public will better serve the local food movement. A survey conducted by Rikkonen et al. (2013) found that consumers would prefer to directly purchase goods from producers rather than large grocery outlets. Therefore, farmers' markets and other direct marketing local food initiatives located in rural areas in proximity to an urban market have a substantial competitive advantage (Rikkonen et al., 2013).

Although several challenges have been identified for local food systems, several initiatives are evolving to overcome them (Jablonski, Schmit & Kay, 2016). As previously discussed, food hubs have been identified as a means to alleviate many of these challenges (Jablonski, Schmit & Kay, 2016; Morley, Morgan & Morgan, 2008; Phillips & Wharton, 2015). A consumer survey conducted by Jablonski, Schmit & Kay (2016) identified several opportunities for food hub expansion by improving the logistics of allowing smaller order sizes and offering a wider variety of products. The collaborative nature of food hubs allows for the creation of networks between urban consumers and rural producers which creates opportunities for transparent transactions that can further strengthen local food systems (Feenstra, 1997).

Leadership from the federal and provincial governments in the form of policy development is promising for the growth of local food. Since the enactment of the Local Food Act in 2013, access to local food has substantially increased (OMAFRA, 2016). The 2015/2016 Local Food Report stated that "since 2013, nearly 300 schools have participated in Fresh from the Farm, distributing almost 750,000 kilograms of fresh Ontario fruit and vegetables" (OMAFRA, 2016, P.25). The report also noted that "total farm sales of field vegetables increased by about 8% from \$375.6 million in 2014 to \$405.6 million in 2015 (ibid). The current development of a national food policy for Canada further demonstrates the commitment of the federal government to the growth of local food (Canada, 2017). Although collaboration was identified as a barrier to local food systems, the existence of the Northeast Community Network demonstrates that cross-political, regional networking for a common goal can be

successful (NeCN, 2017). As interest in local food at all levels continues to grow, additional funding and programming will be made available to further develop local food systems.

7 LOCAL FOOD CASE STUDIES

The following case studies have been chosen to provide context for the discussion of the role of local food in rural economic development. These case studies offer additional perspectives for the previously discussed challenges and opportunities for local food systems.

7.1 Northern Ontario

Local food systems in northern Ontario are met with the additional challenges of limited physical infrastructure, distance, topography and climate (Nelson & Stroink, 2011; Stroink & Nelson, 2013). With regard to the availability of distribution infrastructure, railways no longer service the north; the largest outbound port on the St. Lawrence Seaway system is located in Thunder Bay and is designed for export markets; and two main highways- Hwy 11 and Hwy 17- service all of northern Ontario (Nelson & Stroink, 2011). Northern agri-food stakeholders have identified the need for additional processing and storage facilities for season extension as well as a regional food network to increase the efficiency of the existing local food networks (Nelson & Stroink, 2011).

7.1.1 La Maison Verte

La Maison Verte (LMV), located in Hearst, Ontario, started operations in 1982 as a public benefit organization for a women's group. The organization's original mandate was to promote the welfare of and create financial opportunities for local women (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). What began as a greenhouse funded by a partnership between the provincial government and 70 private investors grew to a viable silvicultural business which filled contracts with forestry companies and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). However, the forestry industry went into a recession in the 1990s which resulted in LMV losing 80% of its seedling business (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). LMV proved to be truly resilient as the organization restructured in 1994 into the production of tomatoes and cucumbers (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). Today, the organization plants 2000 beefsteak tomato plants, 1000 cherry tomato plants, and

200 cucumber plants which provides fresh tomatoes and cucumbers to local and regional residents (Nelson & Stroink, 2011). LMV expanded their operations in 2011 to include a local food basket program and were working on partnering with the local health unit to deliver local food baskets to marginalized individuals (Nelson & Stroink, 2011).

Significant challenges identified by LMV included the lack of transportation and distribution networks given the inherent geography of northern Ontario communities (Nelson & Stroink, 2011). Government regulations were also identified as a challenge as many of the regulations created in southern Ontario are difficult to apply in a northern Ontario context (Nelson & Stroink, 2011). In 2017, LMV will celebrate 35 years in business. This successful, resilient northern organization truly demonstrates the importance of being innovative and adaptive (Nelson & Stroink, 2011).

7.1.2 Eat Local Sudbury

Eat Local Sudbury (ELS) was incorporated as the first food co-op in northern Ontario in 2007 (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). ELS began as a vendor at the Sudbury farmers' market; after gaining considerable support, it moved to its current retail outlet in downtown Sudbury (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). The storefront directly links local producers to Sudbury consumers through a market in which they both have shares (Miller, 2010). Beyond its direct marketing endeavours, ELS has been vital to the local food movement in Sudbury by working to inform and educate the public on the importance of supporting local food through workshops and events (Miller, 2010; Nelson & Stroink, 2011). ELS has identified lack of consistent funding as a key challenge for the organization, as staffing is reliant on federal and provincial grants (Nelson & Stroink, 2011). The organization continues to evolve to meet the current needs of northern consumers while simultaneously creating more opportunities to support local food in northeastern Ontario.

7.2 Eastern Ontario

The Eastern Ontario Local Food and Farming Collaborative is a coalition of non-profit organizations in Eastern Ontario working to support farming and local food in the region (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). The following local food initiatives are members of the coalition and have the distinct challenge and opportunity of being

geographically proximate to each other while also having overlapping markets (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). Through a collaborative effort these initiatives are continually adapting to consumer demands to effectively increase access to local food in the region.

7.2.1 Two Rivers Food Hub

The Two Rivers Food Hub is a non-profit organization based in Smiths Falls, Ontario, that was incorporated in March of 2015 (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). The hub is the product of years of efforts by two local non-profit, non-governmental organizations, Lanark Local Flavour and ecoPerth (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). The hub currently boasts a large commercial kitchen space for rent, wholesale aggregation and distribution, processing and storage equipment to rent, an online marketplace, a weekly food basket program, and value-chain coordination services (Two Rivers Food Hub, 2017). The hub currently works with approximately 50 regional producers in the aggregation and distribution of local food to eastern Ontario consumers (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). As the organization is a non-profit, its main challenge is lack of consistent funding. The hubs revenue comes from membership fees, donations, food sales, rental fees, in-kind support and federal and local government funding (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). The hub relies on approximately 25-30 volunteers for its operations with only 1.5 paid employees, which include the hub manager and coordinator. The hub has identified collaboration as an opportunity for the future viability of its operations as one board member of the hub has stated: “All of us in eastern Ontario had to rely on each other because mainstream local food institutions all centre on Toronto. So we’ve all been building trust with each other. We all work together and this is the Eastern Ontario Local Food and Farming Collaborative” (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015, p. 5).

7.2.2. Eastern Ontario Agri-Food Network

The Eastern Ontario Agri-Food Network (EOAN), located in L’Original, Ontario, is a non-profit organization that was incorporated in 2010 to promote the development of the agri-food sector in eastern Ontario (EOAN, 2013; Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). The

organization is responsible for supporting agri-food businesses, increasing the marketing of local food and maintaining local food stakeholder networks (EOAN, 2013). The EOAN offers nutrition labelling assistance to producers and has developed specialty branded beef products (Eastern Ontario Beef Brand) that are truly local (raised, processed and sold in eastern Ontario). The organization is also responsible for an annual local food festival (La Foire Gourmande) and the development of a Local Food Map and Smartphone Application (EOAN, 2013). As a non-profit organization, the EOAN relies heavily on volunteers and has just one part-time paid coordinator (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). The organizations income is acquired through membership fees, nutrition labelling assistance, service fees, and provincial and federal funding (Knezevic, Andrée, Jarosiewicz & Barron, 2015). As has been previously mentioned by other non-profit organizations, the lack of consistent funding was identified as a challenge for the EOAN.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The literature suggests that consumer demand for local food is growing due to increasing concerns about the environmental, social and economic costs of the globalised food system. The development of various local food initiatives is creating opportunities for relationships to develop between urban consumers and rural producers, which is furthering the dialogue of the importance of buying local food. These initiatives, including farmers' markets, CSAs and food hubs, appear to increase the profitability of farming operations. However, the findings in the literature tend to be place-specific and not generalizable. Further research on the economic impacts of local food initiatives, specifically food hubs, is needed to make broader assumptions.

The literature also suggests that local food can be a vector by which rural economies can be revitalized. However, several challenges and opportunities have been identified for local food initiatives. These challenges and opportunities need to be further analysed to determine their impacts on the long-term viability of local food initiatives. As collaboration was mentioned as both a challenge and an opportunity for local food initiatives, further research on effective collaborative networks is necessary to determine how to best facilitate these interactions.

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