

Fostering food literacy in schools

Ontario Food Collaborative's Virtual Annual General Meeting and Symposium

Carolyn Webb, Sustain Ontario's Edible Education Network



Harvesting from the garden at Fellowes High School, Pembroke



Farm to School in action at Primrose Elementary School, Mulmur



Students growing, composting, and eating at Nobel Public School, Parry Sound



Sustain Ontario is a province-wide, cross-sectoral alliance that promotes healthy food and farming.



Across Ontario people are doing great work to connect children and youth with good food.

An initiative of Sustain Ontario, the Edible Education Network has been established to bring these groups together.

My Presentation

About food literacy initiatives in schools
and how we can support vibrant food
literacy efforts in school communities
across Canada



Aquaponics Greenhouse at Sir Guy Carleton SS, Ottawa



Ontario Regional Lead for Farm to School

Since 2016 Sustain Ontario has partnered with Farm to Cafeteria Canada to provide \$10,000 Farm to School Salad Bar grants to schools in Ontario.

- 3 rounds of grants – 21 Ontario schools in 2016; 11 Ontario schools in 2018; 10 Ontario schools in 2020; Grants delivered across Canada.
- Strong evaluation component.
- New round of applications available (Deadline January 2022).



Visit the Farm to Cafeteria Canada website for more info
<http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/>



Farm to School Approach

Healthy, Local Food: Schools procure local food from farms or schoolyard farms, through food distributors, or by harvesting wild or traditional foods.

Hands-On Learning: Students learn about food, food systems, and food skills in the school garden, greenhouse, kitchen and classroom. They connect with nature and the environment.

School and Community Connectedness: Farm to School is built upon strong relationships with farmers, community members, and supportive organizations, tapping into local knowledge, passion, skills, and resources.



Food Literacy: Many Definitions

Sustain Ontario's framing – Food Literacy refers to knowledge about:

- Local agriculture and where food comes from
- How food systems impact individual health, broader societal and economic wellbeing, and the environment
- How to grow, access, prepare, and prefer healthy, safe and nutritious food.

School Food as an Education Tool

Food is an excellent tool to teach math, history, literacy, science, geography, art and many other subjects. E.g. you can make salad dressing by teaching that fractions and recipes are the same thing.

Delicious Math

SALAD DRESSING
___ PART ACID
___ PART OIL

ACID OIL
___ 4 ___ 4

The Recipe ___ TBSP ACID
___ TBSP OIL

growingchefs.com

Image thanks to Growing Chefs! Ontario (London)

How are Schools Advancing Food Literacy? Stories of Ontario Schools and Programs



*Students enjoy the salad bar at
Loughborough Public School, Sydenham, ON*



*Students at Quinte Secondary School
(Now Eastside SS), Belleville*

Nobel PS (outside Parry Sound)

- 2016 Recipient of a 3-year \$10,000 Farm to Cafeteria Canada Salad Bar Grant.
- Their goal: to build a culture of long term sustainability and environmental and health education.
- Built cold frames, 13 raised planting beds; 3 tower gardens to grow food.
- Partnered with local college - honeybee hive delivers pollinators to gardens and education to students.
- Initiated 8 vermi-composting bins to deal with salad bar scraps. Compost is used to start seeds and enrich the soil.
- Purchased a commercial dishwasher and reusable plates.



Primrose Elementary (Mulmur, ON)

- Started out experimenting with the Great Big Crunch. Had a strong base in Ecoschools and wanted to grow from there.
- Adopted variety of local food fundraisers.
- Received a 3-year \$10,000 Farm to Cafeteria Canada Salad Bar Grant in 2016.
- In Year 1 served over 369 salads using over 35 kg of mostly “hyper local” food within 10 to 25 km of the school.
- 5 local farmers visited the school in 2016/17 to show students important life skills like growing sprouts, preparing foods, educating students about where food comes from and why and how to eat local.
- Frozen leftover vegetables saved and turned into delicious hearty Moroccan stew at the last salad bar of the year.



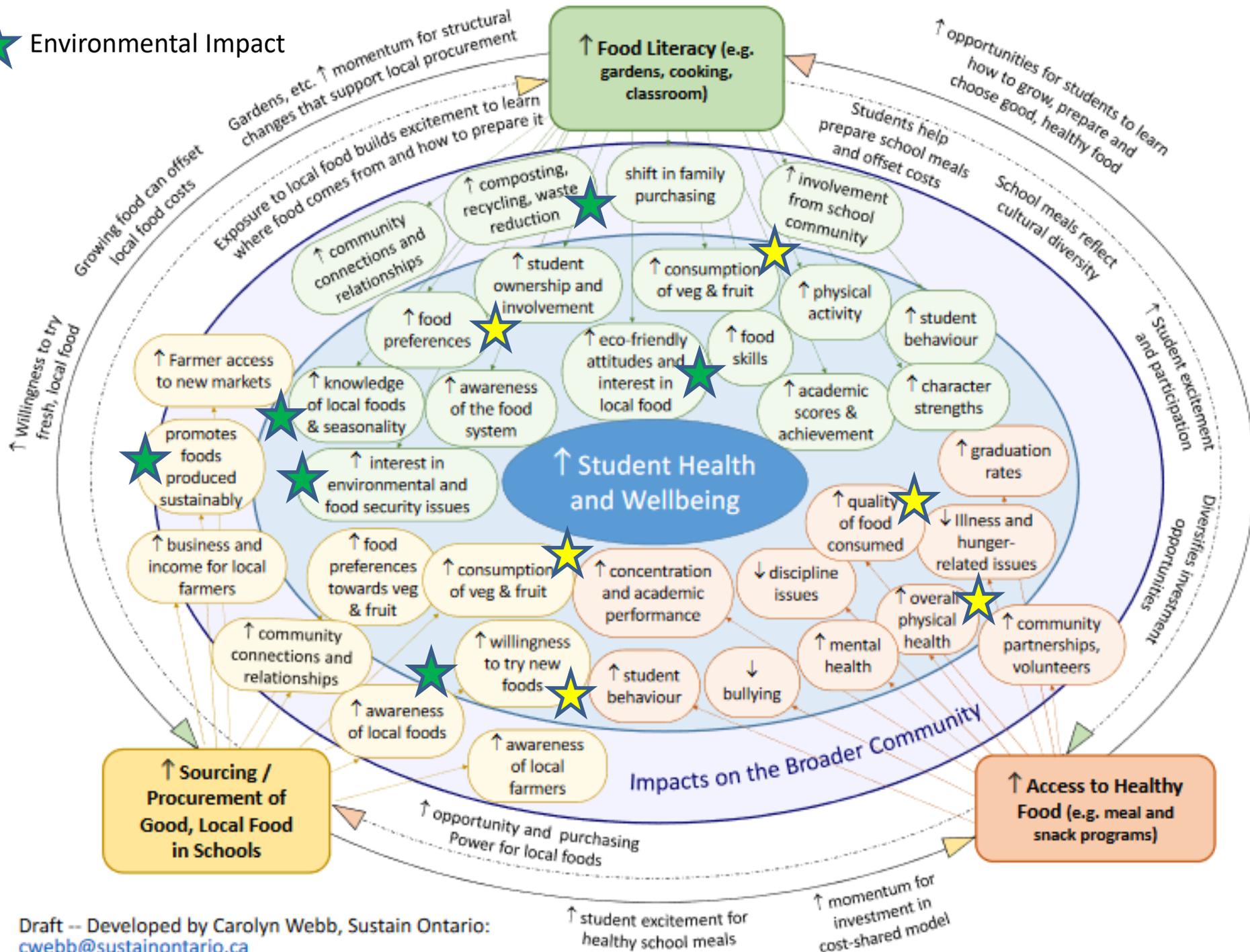
Eastdale Collegiate High School (Toronto)

- Received a 3-year \$10,000 F2S Salad Bar Grant in 2016.
- In Year 2 the salad bar production was creatively integrated into the curriculum of the grade 11 environmental science class.
- Students learned about the environmental impacts of global food production systems and gained hands-on experience planting and growing produce for the salad bar. They also explored opportunities for purchasing locally produced food in the city of Toronto.
- Students in this class were also involved in the Salad Bar Ambassador program, during which they worked in the cafeteria at lunch time promoting and serving the locally produced food that they prepared to students and staff in the cafeteria.

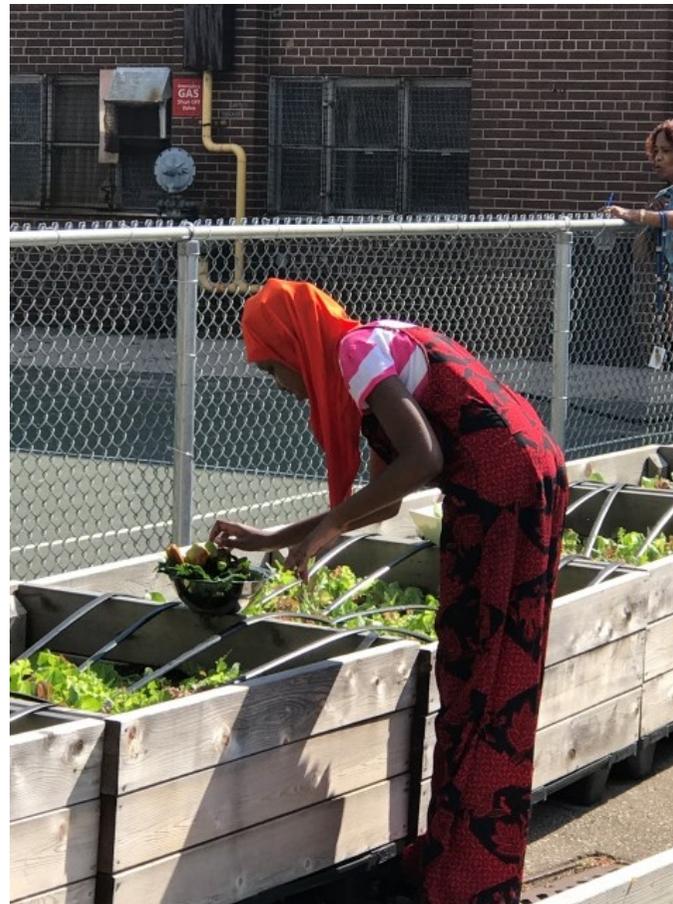


The Potential of School Food Initiatives

- ★ Health Impact
- ★ Environmental Impact



Tying Food Literacy and Food Waste Management Together in a School Setting



Student gardening at Heydon Park SS in Toronto

Food Literacy and Food Waste Connections

Food is much less likely to be wasted when:

- Students have informed the menu
- Students understand how much work it is to grow or prepare the food
- Students have been a part of growing, harvesting, preserving or cooking the food

Food literacy can teach about:

- Food systems
- Where and how food is wasted throughout the food system
- What personal choices can support sustainable food systems
- How to preserve food and cook with what's available
- How to advocate for change



Growing as a pathway to teach about health and sustainability

Gardening is a way to make relevant a conversation about soil health, pollinators, and links to planetary and human health.

Growing Up Organic (Ottawa) runs curriculum-linked garden workshops for grades 3-10

Workshops discuss:

- “What is the value of growing our own vegetable gardens at the school?”
- “Why is healthy soil important in the school garden?”
- “Why is it important to preserve different varieties of fruits, vegetables and grains?”



FoodShare Toronto – Online Resources

Resources include:

- Gardening and soil – e.g. “Compost Cake”; “Rotten Apple Party: Microorganism Dance Party!”
- Food waste – e.g. “Waste in our Food System”

Sample questions:

- “What kind of impact does food system waste have on the environment?”
- “Where does our compost go when we put it in the green bin?”
- “What happens when we put the wrong things in the green bin?”
- “How do the decisions we make about the foods we eat affect the environment?”



<http://foodshare.net/program/educator/>

Food Matters Action Kit

Addressing food waste is a **huge** opportunity to address climate and other sustainability issues



FOOD MATTERS ACTION KIT

ABOUT THIS ACTION KIT FOOD WASTE, THE ENVIRONMENT + CLIMATE CHANGE YOUNG FOOD HEROES ACTIVITY GUIDE JOIN THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

RELATED WEBSITES REGISTER SIGN IN  ENGLISH

Each year, the food we waste costs the North American economy \$278 Billion US dollars and could have fed 260 million people!

This is what else we waste when we waste food:



39 million m³

of landfill space, equivalent to

13 football stadiums

gets used up with our food waste each year



Food Matters Action Kit is available at <http://www3.cec.org/flwy/>

EcoSchools

EcoSchools Canada (previously Ontario EcoSchools) has some great school food resources.

- Waste audit
- Food-focused challenges for schools including Get Cooking!

LOCAL FOOD AWARENESS & ACTION CAMPAIGNS



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<https://ecoschools.ca/>

Evaluation Framework for Farm to School

Articulates outcomes and indicators that people want to see measured at the school level relating to Public Health, Education, Community Economic Development and the Environment



An Evaluation Framework for Farm to School in Canada



WASTE

ENV 1.3 Amount of food waste produced by students at school

<http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca>

How can we all support vibrant food literacy efforts in school communities across Canada?



Advocate for Change!

A group of 170+ organizations and 40+ endorsers across Canada.

Seeking an investment by the federal government in a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program that will enable all students in Canada to have access to healthy meals at school every day.

Liberal election platform committed \$1 billion to school food programs over 5 years.



Send a letter to your MP congratulating them on their election and letting them know you are counting on them to support all-party action on school food.

Visit <https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/> to learn more

Bill 216: Food Literacy for Students Act



Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario

- Proposed as a Private Members Bill by Conservative MPP Daryl Kramp in October 2020

“The *Education Act* is amended to provide that curriculum guidelines shall require that courses of study be developed in experiential food literacy education and healthy eating for every grade from grade 1 through grade 12. The courses of study must ensure that students are given opportunities to grow food, prepare food and learn about local foods.”

- Died with the prorogation of the Ontario Legislature in September 2021
- Will hopefully be re-introduced

Sustain Ontario’s Policy Brief is available at

<https://sustainontario.com/custom/uploads/2021/06/Bill-216-Briefing-Note-Summary.pdf>

Opportunities for Local Governments to Say Yes!

- Ensure that local by-laws and policies are not creating barriers to school food initiatives.
- Establish a local food charter
- Provide infrastructure and equipment (e.g. shipping containers and refrigerated storage units so that multiple programs can store food outside of school hours; or community-shared processing equipment so that programs can very quickly cut up fresh vegetables for snacks).

Opportunities for Local Governments to



Through governance:

- Ensure that local by-laws and policies are not creating barriers to school food initiatives.
- Establish a local food charter.
- Support an evaluation of the current Student Nutrition Program model to ensure a universal program that provides high-quality meals and that aligns with a broad vision for school food.

Through funding and in-kind support:

- Provide funding for Student Nutrition Programs in your region.
- Fund school coordinators and/or community partners to work with school and Student Nutrition Program staff. These dedicated staff can champion and support food programs and work to achieve goals relating to comprehensive school health.
- Provide community initiative grants towards school food programs.
- Provide infrastructure and equipment (e.g. shipping containers and refrigerated storage units so that multiple programs can store food outside of school hours; or community-shared processing equipment so that programs can very quickly cut up fresh vegetables for snacks).
- Invest in school kitchen facilities that can be accessed by community groups or community kitchens that can be accessed by schools, in line with the community food hub model.
- Support logistics and distribution (e.g. help establish food distribution hubs, such as a depot space in each region that has fridges and freezers so that farmers can drop off food and schools can pick it up whenever it is convenient for them, or enable transportation of food).
- Provide technical support or guidelines for online portals that connect farmers to schools.

Through partnership building:

- Provide forums for stakeholders to better understand each other and work together.
- Foster partnerships between schools and other public institutions (e.g. facilitate transportation so that kids can access a community garden at a local city park).
- Facilitate relationships between farmers and schools to encourage local food procurement.

By championing school food:

- Join or liaise with a relevant school board health and wellness, environment, or related committee that deals with school food.
- Visit and learn about programs.
- Advocate for all schools to run universal Student Nutrition Programs; help them with funding.

Visit sustainontario.com/work/edible-education/say-yes/ for more Say Yes! to Good Healthy Food in Schools resources.

<https://sustainontario.com/work/edible-education/say-yes/>

Get in Touch!

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