

Case-in-Point 2022



Figure 1. Proud gardeners at Rainbow Community Garden, Winnipeg

Towards Winnipeg's Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy

Learning Lessons from *fresh: Edmonton's Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy*

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1.0 Introduction

This Case-in-Point study scans *fresh: Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy* (City of Edmonton, 2012) to examine its framework, consultation process and recommendations, and implementation process. This study also assesses the strengths and limitations of the Strategy and reports lessons that may inform Winnipeg's potentially forthcoming Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy.

"Edmonton has a resilient food and agriculture system that contributes to the local economy and the overall cultural, financial, social and environmental sustainability of the city."
- City of Edmonton (2010)

2.0 Background and Context

In 2010, Edmonton's Development Plan, *The Way We Grow* identified *Food and Urban Agriculture* as one of its six strategic goals (City of Edmonton, 2010. p. 15). In 2011, the City of Edmonton invited a diverse group of fourteen residents to form the Advisory Committee to work towards the formulation of a Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy for the city. This group included agri-business owners, financial advisors, asset management firms, advocacy groups, educational institutions, community leagues, restaurant and local business owners, and representatives from the Federal Government's Agriculture and Agri-food Department. The Committee was supported by project consultants and employees of the City

of Edmonton and released *fresh: Edmonton's Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy* in 2012 (City of Edmonton, 2022).

Edmonton's recognition of "*the enormous opportunity provided by a more thoughtful consideration of food and its relationship to local community development*" (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 6) was stated as the prime reason for establishing this Strategy. Edmonton acknowledges that food and urban agriculture can be critical tools for increasing "*sustainability and quality-of-life*" in the city while fueling "*economic development*" (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 6).

3.0 Case Summary

fresh: Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy (City of Edmonton, 2012) is a comprehensive yet concise policy document that describes the context, relevance, consultation process, strategic framework, recommendations, and implementation strategies in seven chapters. The next three sections briefly describe the consultation process, goals, recommendations, and implementation strategies outlined in Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy.

3.1 Consultation Process

The Strategy describes an extensive public engagement process including "*citizen panels and stakeholder workshops; Public opinion, landowner, and feedback surveys; conferences; open houses*"; correspondence by email, and consultation via social media accounts (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 12), claiming participation by more than 3000 Edmontonians (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 12). The Strategy does not report specific considerations or ways to include seniors, visible minorities, differently-abled, Indigenous Peoples, or other vulnerable sections of the city's population in the consultation process.

The emergent key concerns included protecting prime agricultural lands; increasing the

availability of urban spaces for food production; improving economic opportunities for local food businesses; improving access to local foods for consumers; enhancing infrastructure for food and urban agriculture-related businesses; and strengthening resource coordination and information sharing (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 13). These concerns inform the Strategy's five goals and nine strategic directions discussed below.

3.2 Vision, Goals, Recommendations & Implementation

The Advisory Committee adopted one of the Strategic Goals from Edmonton's Development Plan, *The Way We Grow* (City of Edmonton, 2010) as the vision statement for *fresh* (City of Edmonton, 2012). This statement is:

"Edmonton has a resilient food and agriculture system that contributes to the local economy and the overall cultural, financial, social and environmental sustainability of the city."

- City of Edmonton (2010. p.8)

Five goals, that help achieve this vision were then identified by the Advisory Committee as:
"1) *A stronger, more vibrant local economy;*
2) *A healthier, more food secure community,*

VISION

Edmonton has a resilient food and agriculture system that contributes to the local economy and the overall cultural, financial, social, and environmental sustainability of the city.

GOALS



Figure 2. Vision statement & goals, *fresh*: Edmonton's Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy

3) *Healthier ecosystems*; 4) *Less energy, emissions, and waste*, and 5) *More vibrant, attractive and unique places*" (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 20). The Strategy follows a systems approach towards food and recognizes various aspects of food such as growth, processing, transportation, sale, consumption, waste reduction, recovery, and education, and leverages the intersection of these aspects with the city to identify opportunities to meet the five goals. The Advisory Committee identified nine Strategic Directions and listed numerous recommendations for each of these directions. These directions are as follows:

- *"Establish the Edmonton Food Council (EFC);*
- *Provide Food Skill Education and Information;*
- *Expand Urban Agriculture;*
- *Develop Local Food Infrastructure Capacity;*
- *Grow Local Food Supply and Demand;*
- *Enliven the Public Realm Through a Diversity of Food Activities;*
- *Treat Food Waste as a Resource;*
- *Support Urban Farmers and Ecological Approaches to Farming; and*
- *Integrate Land Use for Agriculture."*

- City of Edmonton (2012, p. 21)

Some key recommendations in the Strategy include that the City should:

- *"Assess and map Edmonton's food system assets"* and *"support mentorship and training for urban agriculture"* (City of Edmonton, 2012. pp. 32,33).
- Collaborate with EFC and other industry and institutional partners to seek *"learning opportunities on key food and urban agriculture topics and initiatives"* (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 32).
- Consider exploring *"urban agriculture opportunities in existing and developing neighbourhoods"* including beekeeping and poultry farming (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 34).
- Support the appropriation of urban spaces to better accommodate opportunities for local food businesses, support urban food infrastructure, and partner with industry and economic agencies to institute an *"Agri-Food Hub"* (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 37).
- Create partnerships to strengthen and diversify the local food economy, bolster farmers' markets and *"increase local food purchasing within City of Edmonton operations"* and collaborate with EFC to *"examine local food system resilience"* (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 40).
- Promote locally produced food, producing

agencies, and community gardens. (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 43)

- Leverage partnerships to support the “*redistribution of healthy, fresh and high-quality surplus food*”, develop food waste reduction initiatives, and lead initiatives to reduce the volume of packaging (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 46).
- Assess current regulations and guidelines for urban and peri-urban agriculture and identify methods to promote the ecological health of peri-urban agricultural lands (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 46).
- Consider establishing Agricultural Land Reserves, analyze costs and benefits of various ways for agricultural land protection while adopting the “*Integrating Land for Agriculture Framework*” and work with the Edmonton Metropolitan Region to develop

a regional agricultural land use policy (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 56).

The Strategy demonstrates alignment with other Municipal Policies such as *The Way Ahead* and *The Way We Grow* (City of Edmonton, 2012). The Strategy acknowledges that various stakeholders including the people of Edmonton shall be accountable for implementation and directs the EFC to lead the implementation and review process for the plan. EFC is further tasked with recommending “*priorities and work plans*” (City of Edmonton, 2012. p 61) to the City and is instructed to leverage connections with partners to identify emerging issues, advise potential solutions, and examine and inform the outcomes of the Strategy (City of Edmonton, 2012). The Edmonton Food Council is expected to continue and expand community consultation processes to gain feedback.

4.0 Outcomes

The City established Edmonton Food Council (EFC) in 2013 (Edmonton Food Council, 2016) and has taken up various initiatives to integrate urban agriculture into the city, such as *Urban Beekeeping, Urban Hens Program, Vacant Lot Cultivation Pilot, and Veg Instead!* (City of Edmonton, 2022). Other achievements include revisions to zoning by-laws to permit agricultural activities, collaborating with business organizations to increase demand for locally grown food, and partnering with the University of Alberta for research regarding surplus food redistribution and edible placemaking (City of Edmonton, 2022).

4.1 Strengths

With these achievements and strategic actions, understanding the strengths of the Strategy Plan and listing learnings may contribute to the efficacy of similar policy documents for other municipalities. These strengths are briefly discussed below:

4.1.1 A Broad Definition of Local Food

The Strategy considers various definitions of local food, including that from all regions of Alberta, as considered by Alberta Agriculture



Figure 3. Local food as a broad range

and Rural Development, or that from within 600 Km as considered by the US Congress in the 2008 Farm Act. The Document states that various considerations beyond the location of the primary production area, including locations of processing plants, offices and firm headquarters, and residency of labour force should be examined while identifying local foods.

Rather than an enclosing boundary, the Strategy identifies a broad range to define the most local food and least local food. This broadening of the definition may have helped Edmonton include agri-businesses from the larger region and may have also supported the identification of opportunities to increase the 'localness' of specific foods.

4.1.2 Robust Stakeholder Partnership & Public Consultation Process

The Strategy directs the City to forge partnerships with industry leaders and business organizations to strengthen the implementation process while leveraging the research acumen and expertise of Education Institutions such as the University of Alberta to inform recommendations. A comprehensive public consultation aided by advocacy organizations and involvement from citizens groups such as the city's Community Leagues may have further enriched the recommendations.

4.1.3 A Systems Approach to Food

The Strategy identifies seven elements of food systems that allows the identification of a variety of interfaces between food and urban systems. These elements include “*Land & Space for Agriculture; Farming & Food Production; Processing & Distribution; Buying & Selling; Eating & Celebration; Food Waste & Recovery; and, Education & Governance*” (City of Edmonton, 2012. p.18). This broad understanding of food may have allowed Edmonton to create “*a more resilient and*



Figure 4. Edmonton's Food Systems approach

thriving local food economy” (City of Edmonton, 2012. p.18) by better integrating ways to grow, process, and celebrate local foods while creating market demand and protecting prime agricultural land.

4.2 Limitations

While *fresh: Edmonton's Food and Urban Agricultural Strategy* is a comprehensive document, some limitations can be recognized. These are:

4.2.1 Limited Understanding of Agricultural Products

Although the definition of agriculture in the glossary includes the cultivations of produce for *fiber, biofuel, and other products* (City of Edmonton, 2012. p. 68) the language of the document primarily addresses opportunities for food production for human consumption. With this exclusion, opportunities such as harvesting non-traditional plants like cattail and duckweed for bioenergy production have not been identified. Broadening the definition of agriculture to include these processes and products may add to the efficacy of the strategy.

4.2.2 Limited Understanding of Agricultural Opportunities

The Strategy limits the identification of agricultural opportunities to land-based activities. This limited understanding deters the identification of urban water bodies, including stormwater green infrastructure components for the integration of urban agriculture. Research has demonstrated that the integration of urban agriculture with stormwater green infrastructure can have multiple environmental, social and economic benefits (Deksissa et. al., 2021).

4.2.3 Reconciliation Lens Missing

Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy may have benefited from the addition of an eighth element to the *food system* which identifies and integrates reconciliation opportunities for additional benefits. This inclusion would have helped the Strategy to support healing, increase Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and address risks such as diabetes

that challenge the health of Indigenous Peoples in Alberta (Diabetes Canada, 2021). The application of Indigenous Knowledge may further reduce the environmental impacts of agriculture. Additionally, the Strategy does not record ways to include Indigenous Peoples in the public consultation process.

5.0 Lessons Learned

The City of Winnipeg’s deliberations regarding food and urban agriculture currently include the establishment of the Winnipeg Food Council (City of Winnipeg, 2022), by-law revision to permit agriculture as a secondary activity in non-agricultural land uses (City of Winnipeg, 2022), and adoption of a **Community Gardening Policy** (City of Winnipeg, n.d.). The City has also initiated a pilot project to reduce food waste in 2021 (City of Winnipeg, n.d.) and introduced urban beekeeping regulations in 2017 (City of Winnipeg, 2022).



Figure 5. Winnipeg Food Council’s approach to food

4.2.4 Limited Implementation Strategy

Except for the formation of the Edmonton Food Council, other implementation strategies have been excluded from fresh: Edmonton’s Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy (City of Edmonton, 2012). Despite this exclusion, other strengths of the Strategy have allowed appreciable progress in the implementation of recommendations.

Additionally, The City of Winnipeg has already devised an understanding of a food system that includes processes to **grow, process, distribute, get, make** food and manage **waste** (City of Winnipeg, 2022). However, the adoption of a Winnipeg-specific Food and Urban Agriculture Direction Strategy may direct and intensify the integration of urban agriculture with the city’s urban structures. With this scan, the following lessons for a potentially forthcoming **Urban Agriculture and Food Direction Strategy** for Winnipeg can be listed. The City of Winnipeg should:

- Establish a comprehensive, inclusive, and continuous public engagement and feedback process.
- Forge and leverage partnerships with business organizations, educational institutions, neighborhood associations, expert agencies, and advocacy organizations to inform the assessment framework, recommendations, and the implementation process.
- Identify opportunities to advance reconciliation by collaborating with Indigenous Organizations while endeavoring to increase Indigenous Food Sovereignty, strengthen Indigenous Food Systems, reduce environmental impacts of agriculture and manage health risks to Indigenous Peoples in Southern Manitoba.
- Broaden the definition of urban agriculture to include plants produced for additional uses such as biofuel, animal fodder, and medicinal uses while acknowledging Winnipeg’s waters including rivers, creeks, wetlands, retention ponds, and swales as potential urban agricultural opportunities.

6.0 Conclusion

The City of Winnipeg may build on the successes and learn from the limitations of Edmonton's Food and Urban Agricultural Policy to inform its Policies and Strategies. The lessons learned from scanning fresh: Edmonton's Food & Urban Agriculture Strategy include construing a comprehensive, inclusive, and continued public consultation process, leveraging partnerships to strengthen recommendations and imple-

mentation strategies, including identification of opportunities for advancing reconciliation while incorporating a broad understanding of agriculture and agricultural opportunities.

7.0 References

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Figure List

Figure 1: The Winnipeg Foundation. (2020). Rainbow Community Garden participants at the University of Manitoba site, including Raymond Ngarbouli [Photograph]. Growing Community – The Winnipeg Foundation. www.wpgfdn.org. Growing community - The Winnipeg Foundation (wpgfdn.org)

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Figure 5: City of Winnipeg. (2022). The Food System [Diagram]. Via Healthy Food Policy Project. What is a food system? - Winnipeg Food Council. www.winnipeg.ca. <https://winnipeg.ca/clerks/boards/WpgFoodCouncil/systems.stm>