FROM PLANS TO POTS AND PANS

IMPLEMENTING FOOD SYSTEMS PLANS IN CANADIAN CITIES

QUINN MORLEY DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA CAPSTONE PROJECT

BACKGROUND

Food is an important part of our lives, and the planning and design of our cities plays a major role in shaping how food can be produced, processed, transported, and accessed. Because city planning can influence the food system in so many ways, many cities have introduced Food Systems Plans to shape and address problems in their local food environment.

While lots of research exists on Food Systems Planning, research tends to only focus on successful initatives, and often do not analyze the implementation process.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **WHO** are the actors involved in implementing food systems plans in Canadian communities, and what roles do they play in addressing food deserts?
2. **WHAT** actions and strategies to implement food systems plans have been used by these actors?
3. **HOW** effective have existing relationships and approaches been in the pursuit of improving food access in Canadian communities?

CASE SELECTION

For my research, I looked at large Canadian cities which have a Food Systems Plan with a strong role for both government and community actors, in effect for 10 years. Applying this criteria, I analyzed three cities: **Calgary**, **Edmonton**, and **Vancouver**.

METHODS

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Conducted to collect data on the actors, objectives, and recommended actions in each plan, and to compare its alignment with other municipal policies.

City	Document Type	Document Name
Calgary	Food Systems Plan	*CalgaryEATS!*
		Calgary Food Resilience Strategy
	Development Plan	*The Calgary Plan*
Edmonton	Food Systems Plan	*fresh*
	Development Plan	*Edmonton City Plan*
	Other Document	*EndPovertyEdmonton*
Vancouver	Food Systems Plan	*What Feeds Us*
	Development Plan	*Vancouver Plan*
	Other Document	*Vancouver Food Charter*

INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with food systems planners and with community-based food security organizations in each city to collect data and perspectives on plan implementation. Seven participants accepted my interview invitation.

MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT THE DOCUMENTS SAID

WHO ARE THE ACTORS INVOLVED?

All three cities divided actors into two groups: **government actors** who should "regulate" the food system through laws, policies, and incentives; and **community actors** who are the "boots on the ground" in addressing food access issues. Private-sector actors were not seen as major actors.

WHAT OBJECTIVES ARE THERE?

All three food systems plans have some shared high-level objectives. However, many cities have different focus areas which shape differences in policy.

Objective	CGY	EDM	VAN
Environmental Sustainability	✔	✔	✔
Cultural Equity	✔	✔	✔
Economic Development	✔	✔	✔
Food-Supportive City Planning	✔	✔	✔
Food System Resiliency	✔		
Community Empowerment			✔

WHAT ACTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED?

Many recommended actions are similar at a high level, and they include Government Actors supporting the work of Community Actors, and Government Actors using policy and incentives to influence the private sector. However, many recommended actions change based on the objectives of each plan.

HOW DO THEY ALIGN WITH POLICY?

The level of policy alignments varies significantly between the cities:

- Vancouver's Development Plan closely aligns with their Food System Plan.
- Calgary's Development Plan has some high-level similarities.
- Edmonton's Development Plan has minimal evidence of alignment.

WHAT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID

WHERE THE ACTORS WORK BEST

The work of Community Actors was often seen as most useful in addressing short-term issues of food access, with actors using terms like "Band-Aid" and "charitable" to describe their work. Government Actors were seen as essential, but not always effective, in supporting long-term and systematic changes.

FUNDING AND THE GOVERNMENT

Government Actors took on the role of a "funder" of Community Actors, which was rarely mentioned in plans. This funding was also seen as transactional, as Community Actors may have little desire to advance food policies without dedicated funding, and Government Actors saw funding as a tool to influence actors.

SUCCESS COMES FROM STRUCTURE

Participants raised the importance of having mechanisms within government to enact food systems plans, like embedding food advocates in planning. Without those mechanisms in government food systems plans can be forgotten and fail to result in meaningful change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COORDINATE RESPONSES BETWEEN ACTORS

Food systems planning works best when the perspectives and initiatives of community actors are coordinated with government policy. Well supported Municipal Food Committees are great ways to support coordination.

IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS, BUILD PODIUMS

Plans are most effective when food system advocates can apply a "food lens" to government decision-making. When advocates cannot meaningfully impact decisions, the effectiveness of food systems plans are significantly limited.

SUPPORT AND FUND INITIATIVES FOR CHANGE

Funding and legislative support are a cornerstone of advancing planning goals, and are essential to getting buy-in of community actors into government objectives. Ensure that food security initiatives are funded, and initiatives for systematic change are supported.