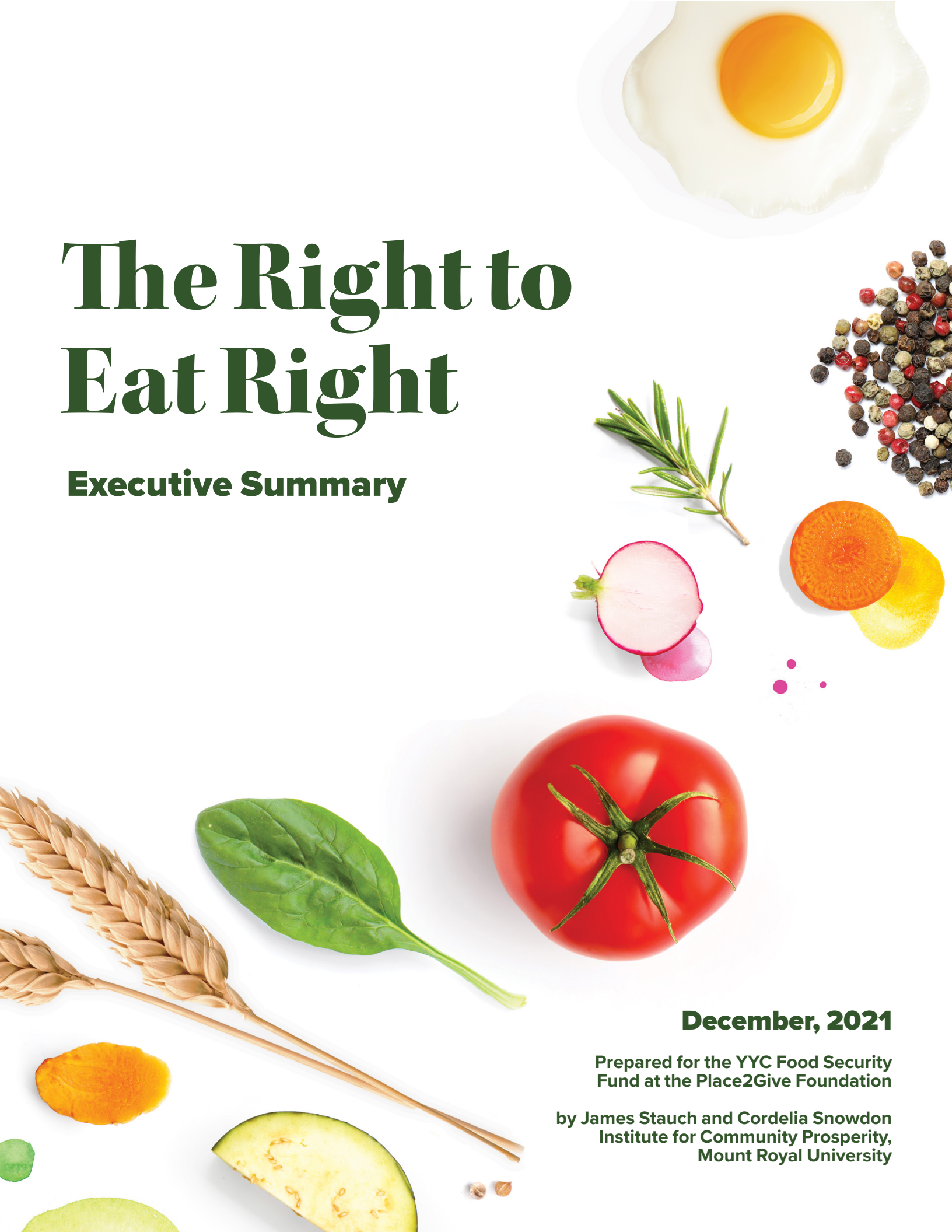


The Right to Eat Right

Executive Summary



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Prepared for the YYC Food Security Fund at the Place2Give Foundation

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Executive Summary

The YYC Food Security Fund was born in 2020, seeking to connect the two worlds of ‘upstream’ food security - sustainable agricultural production and distribution - with ‘down stream’ food insecurity - ensuring all citizens have adequate access to healthy and affordable food. An initiative of Calgary philanthropist Zai Mamdani, supported through the Place2Give Foundation, the Fund seeks to build a thriving local food economy while addressing some of the challenges underpinning Calgary’s food ecosystem. Most food philanthropy focuses on the downstream aspects of food security - mainly through food charity. The YYC Food Security Fund aims to also focus on the upstream aspects focusing on local food production and distribution.

The Fund takes a venture philanthropy approach to investing in community prosperity, which means it aims to invest not just in existing models, but in rapid prototyping, testing and evaluating new models. The Fund is also informed and shaped by business owners, merchants, suppliers, philanthropists, community activists, farmers, ranchers and other producers.

The YYC Local Food Distribution Hub

One of the early opportunities the YYC Food Security Fund identified was to test whether the transportation, warehousing and distribution components of the food supply chain could be a fruitful leverage point for positive system-wide change. To test this approach, the YYC *Local Food Distribution Hub* was born. By bringing together local family-operated producers with charities focused on alleviating downstream food insecurity, along with a committee of advisory members, *The YYC Local Food Distribution Hub* sought to test whether the transportation, warehousing and distribution components of the food supply chain could be a fruitful leverage point for positive system wide change. The Hub concept aims to support the local economy by paying fair market value to local family-owned farms, ranches and other producers, infusing those products into the local charitable sector. In turn, the charity customers use the purchased food in programs and services offered by those agencies. These programs may include direct distribution to consumers

through food hampers, or through other existing food service programs, such as food preparation for children in school or in after-school care programs, or for people living in homeless shelters. Ultimately, the aim of the Hub is for the charity to be empowered with more information and a deeper connection to the local food system. This knowledge would then be translated down to their clients and participants.

The Institute for Community Prosperity was engaged to chronicle the early stages of this real-life, real-time hub development process, while at the same time gathering and distilling relevant knowledge about both upstream and downstream food security, particularly in a Calgary regional context. Mamdani and the YYC Food Security Fund are also looking at addressing other systemic aspects of Calgary’s food security challenges. As such, this report looks at an overview of key food security insights relevant to all Canadians, dimensions of food insecurity in Calgary, the array of current and in-development interventions attempting to address food insecurity, as well as the landscape of other potential solutions available to organizations, policy-makers and others in the food ecosystem.

Among the key findings of *Right to Eat Right* report are that food hubs run as purely charitable entities are rarely viable; there is a desire for a deeper connection between producers and food charities; perspectives on the role of food charity are diverse and often polarized; and time is critical - both timing to sync with agricul-

tural production and time to allow trust and buy-in to develop. The report contains a glossary of commonly encountered food system terms, a list of food system resources, and appendices on identified community stakeholders and works consulted.

Food Security: Downstream and Upstream

Food security, as defined by the UN, is when “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.”¹ Locally, food security is an issue of significant public concern. Some of the key facts, trends and features as follows:

- Fully 12.4% of Canadians, or 1.1 million households (representing more than four million individuals), experience food insecurity.²
- Locally, according to Vital Signs 2020, 33% of Calgarians struggle to afford basics like rent, utilities, and groceries, and 17% often or always struggle.³
- Tens of thousands of Calgarians access emergency food hampers. In 2016, for example, over 170,000 Calgarians, including 66,000 children under 16 accessed food hampers from the Calgary Food Bank alone.⁴

- The wide array of local emergency food resources (many of which are highlighted in Appendix D of the report) results in both competition and collaboration, though is undoubtedly confusing from the standpoint of a food-insecure Calgarian. It is also confusing for private funders who want to move the dial on food insecurity.
- Agricultural policies and regulations still show a preference for (and incentivize) export-oriented, large-scale production, as well as corporate-dominated supply chains and value-added production.

There are at least two distinct understandings of food security, and its inverse - food insecurity. Many people think of food security from the consumption standpoint: As the universal availability and affordability of food (or of nutritionally viable food) - i.e. "Do we have enough food to ensure that no one goes hungry?" We might think of this as DOWNSTREAM FOOD SECURITY. Others think of food security from a production perspective: Either as the ability of the food production system to maintain healthy land, soil, genetic diversity and agricultural resilience, including in the face of droughts and other natural disasters (climate-change induced or otherwise), or as the continuity and resilience of food supply chains. These are forms of UPSTREAM FOOD INSECURITY. The story of food security in Canada, from early contact to contemporary policies and practices, is inextricably linked to colonization in the upstream sense, and shaped by Victorian paternalism in the downstream sense.⁵

Among the factors impacting the food system, the upstream aspects (production, processing, transportation and distribution) receive less attention in an urban context than the downstream aspects (such as retail, food charity, and household access and consumption). Despite the dominance of large-scale, export-oriented agriculture, we have seen a resurgence of interest in, and consumer demand for, locally-grown, organic, heirloom, free-range, and humanely-reared products. Movements promoting such concepts as "Farm-to-Fork", "100 Mile Diet", "agro-ecology" and "regenerative farming" have emerged, gaining some traction with mostly middle class or more well-heeled consumers. Not surprisingly, in part because such food has higher margins and production costs, there has been little prior connection to the realm of food charity, where affordability and efficiency understandably reigns supreme.

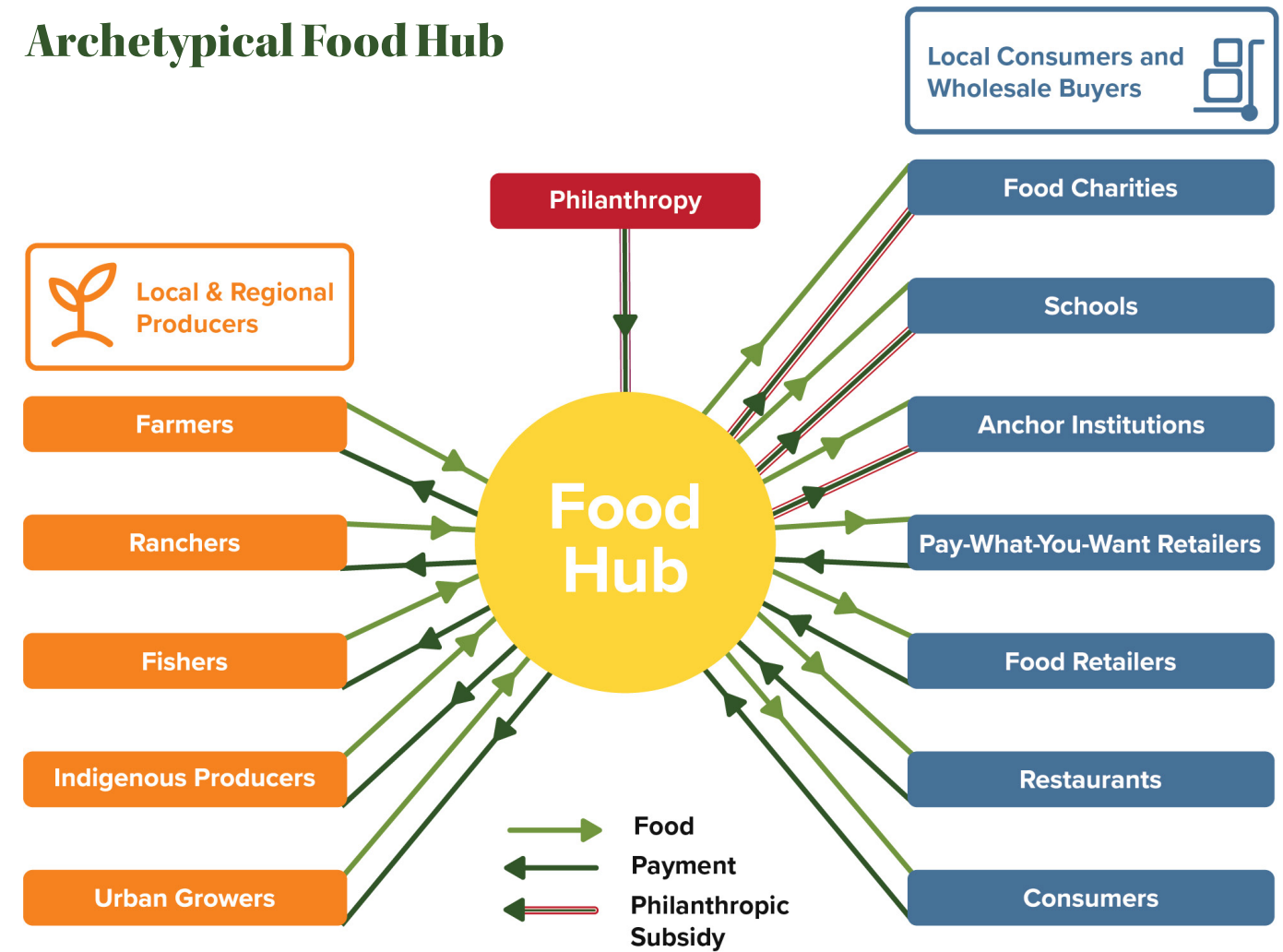
The *Right to Eat Right* Report covers the history and contemporary of both downstream and upstream food security in much more detail. It also covers a range of other contemporary food trends: Agricultural Professionals in Decline, Concentration and Consolidation of Agriculture, Agri-Tech, Culinary Skills and Nutritional Literacy, Food Deserts, Food Philanthropy, Food Waste, Food and Climate Change, and the Rise of Urban Agriculture.

Food Hubs

Food hubs are a way to bridge upstream and downstream food security, supporting the regional agricultural value chain through relationships with local farmers and other producers, while at the same time supporting local access, small retailers and affordable consumption. However, there are many 'flavours' of food hubs worldwide, from industrial scale food distribution centres to grassroots community food centres. Food terminals and other distribution nodes, Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs), community food centres, and even farmers' markets are variously referred to as food hubs. Virtually all definitions of food hubs place emphasis on a local or regional focus, in the growing, processing, and distributing of the food item. Their primary purpose is typically to increase market access, and lower distribution costs, for small and medium local or regional producers.

A food hub is an entity that works within a specific region with a targeted focus on one or more components of the food value chain. As noted in the *Food Hub Business Assessment Toolkit*, "The term 'food hub' emerged in the last decade to describe alternative food aggregation, distribution, and processing enterprises that began developing or expanding within regions across the [United States]. These enterprises sought to fill gaps in infrastructure to move food from farms to consumers within the same region."⁶

Archetypical Food Hub



Food hubs provide some insurance against the vulnerabilities (as well as nutritional, diversity, and flavour compromises) attached to global supply chains. They typically place strong emphasis on helping producers maximize local markets and value-added opportunities, at the same time helping retailers, restaurateurs, and consumers understand food origins (i.e. "Where does my food come from?"). As such, food hubs sometimes build in traceability provisions into the local supply chain. Many food hub variants engaged in downstream food access and affordability also emphasize dignity of consumption and de-stigmatizing food access for those experiencing food insecurity. While the United States is further ahead than Canada in the development of food hubs, nearly every province and territory in Canada has either an entity or program with the title of 'Food Hub', or at least has explored the concept. And interest is growing.

Chronicling the Journey of The YYC Local Food Distribution Hub

The YYC Local Food Distribution Hub, in the short time between its inception and the writing of this case study, has gone through many iterations, piloting, prototyping, and pivoting based on discoveries around upstream and downstream dynamics, interests, and rapidly shifting market and social conditions. While there was early excitement, and in many ways continued excitement, about the overall potential of the Food Hub (as well as complementary initiatives that might over time be supported through the YYC Food Security Fund), there were also a significant number of questions raised and critiques about the project. The team behind the Food Hub took this feedback and have used it to advance the initiatives of the YYC Food Security Fund ultimately integrating the findings into its next pilot project – “Kin”, a Pay-What-You-Want food market.

Project Timeline



September 2020

YYC Food Security Fund conversations begin



October 2020

First Food Security roundtable meeting



March-April 2021

Initial idea of a food distribution hub emerges; focus on restaurants more than food charities



May 2021

Institute for Community Prosperity engaged to chronicle food hub development and broader food security context



May 2021

Establishing process and framework; original distributor withdraws and YYC Growers steps in as distributor



June-July 2021

Community stakeholder interviews



June 2021

Reflections and preparation for orders



July 2021

Phase 1 Pilot Official Kick-Off



August 2021

Pause for reflection and assessment



September 2021

Transition into Phase 2

The report chronicles each stage of YYC Local Food Distribution Hub journey in detail. This modified case study approach looks more closely at food hubs globally, in North America, and elsewhere in Canada. It outlines how the seed of the Food Hub was germinated, grown, and altered based on real-time testing and feedback from many stakeholders. It outlines what worked and what didn't, and why, and contains deeper “food for thought” on certain questions:

- **Membership & equity** – Who is commonly left out of local food initiatives and how might the YYC Local Food Distribution Hub address this common equity gap?
- **What is “local”?** – What does it mean for something to be local and how does it affect membership/procurement?
- **How can funding policy and advocacy make a difference?** – Why start with local pilots when national policy-oriented interventions might be more effective?
- **COVID Impact on the Hub** – What influence has the pandemic had on the Food Hub's journey?

Toward a Future Food-Secure Calgary

The ideas and recommendations put forward below, again described in more detail in the *Right to Eat Right* full report, relate mainly to creating a supportive ecosystem for food hubs. This represents just a sample of the much larger array of steps - not outlined here - that will help us reconfigure our food system to end deprivation, maximize nutrition, strengthen sovereignty and build equity, innovation and sustainability into every aspect of food production, distribution and consumption. With respect to building downstream food security, we need to:

- Stop assuming a new solution or organization is needed when we see a problem;
- Stop creating barriers for hungry people by collecting so much information from them; and
- Above all else, stop pretending that temporary measures to alleviate hunger or food access are in any way permanent solutions to downstream food insecurity.

We also need to work better together. This means we need to stop competing unnecessarily, stop restricting the flow of knowledge (between organizations,

- **Move fast or plan first?** – Balancing careful planning with agile development - how to decide between taking time to learn more deeply about the issue prior to designing the way forward or taking action quickly with rapid, small-scale prototyping, adjusting and pivoting on the fly.

A number of key pivot points already taken or in process are chronicled in the full report. It also explores other potential future pivots and directions:

- Expanding and diversifying upstream products and producers
- Expanding and diversifying downstream food providers
- Local labelling
- Value-added processing
- Values-based purchasing
- Seeding, or shifting to, a commercial or social enterprise
- Becoming a food terminal/ wholesale food market
- Narrowing the price gap through philanthropy
- Philanthropic convening

with the public and across the research-practitioner divide), and break down divides between producers and consumer (which also means getting out on the land!). We also need to initiate and scale efforts around the following:

- Build additional public education, awareness and dialogue on food security;
- Pursue policies that eliminate downstream food insecurity including the right to food and adequate income support;
- Advocate for policies to enhance upstream food insecurity at all levels of government; and
- Commit to expand, diversify, and amplify the collective voice of civil society food security.

The path to ensuring a food-secure Calgary is multi-dimensional, but completely achievable. It requires further mobilization of evidence, commitment, and will from all levels of government, a much louder, more diverse, and more united voice from non-profits working on food security, and an appreciation and commitment toward both downstream and upstream food security. The *Right to Eat Right* report is one modest contribution toward a path forward.

Endnotes

- ¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. (2005). Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security. Rome: UN. p. 5. <https://www.fao.org/3/y7937e/y7937e00.pdf>
- ² Raphael, D., Komakech, M., Torrence, R., & Bryant, T. (2018, September 27). We Fail Our Citizens in Canada - and The UN is Onto Us. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/we-fail-our-citizens-in-canada-and-the-un-is-onto-us-103894>
- ³ Calgary Foundation. (2020). 2020 Vital Signs Report. p. 7. <https://calgaryfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/120300-calgary-foundation-vital-signs-report-v5-hr-print.pdf>
- ⁴ Ferguson, E. (2016, December 25). More Kids than Ever Arriving to School Hungry as Food Insecurity Rises. The Calgary Herald. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/more-kids-than-ever-arriving-to-school-hungry-as-food-insecurity-rises>
- ⁵ Mintz, 2020.
- ⁶ Vanderburgh-Wertz, D., & Moraghan, M. R. (2014). Food Hub Business Assessment Toolkit. Wholesome Wave. p. 12. <http://cooperatives.dyson.cornell.edu/food-hub/pdf/Vanderburgh-Wertz%20Food-Hub-Business-Assessment-Toolkit.pdf>.

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