Executive Summary

JustFOOD

Action Plan for the Halifax Region

PART A - FEBRUARY 2023

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Executive Summary

This document is the *JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region: Part A*.

Part B of the Plan will be developed following the public launch of Part A.

Part A sets the stage for our regional food system, captures public engagement findings, and lays out a set of recommendations for positive food system transformation. Part A is intended to function as a living document that will be monitored, evaluated, and refined over time as necessary.

Part B of the Plan will include formal commitments to action from food system partners as well as implementation strategies needed to make Plan recommendations a reality. A complete action Plan, comprising Part A and Part B, will be brought to Halifax Regional Council for approval in 2023.

The development of the JustFOOD Action Plan is co-led by the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Halifax Food Policy Alliance.

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Introduction

A just and resilient local food system exists when all residents can access healthy and sustainably produced foods with dignity; when community health is assured; when food workers are supported; and when our agricultural and fishing communities thrive.

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has a complex, adaptive food system as well as a rich history of local production and self-reliance. However, nearly one in five HRM households cannot access the food they need. In fact, the average rate of household food insecurity across HRM is 18.6%[1] as compared to an average of 15.9% across Canadian provinces.[2] As the municipality continues to grow, there is a unique opportunity to strengthen our food system.

The creation, adoption, and implementation of the *JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region* is a significant investment in our future. It is designed to bring communities and key players together to improve food security, reduce food inequities, support inclusive economic growth, foster resilience in the face of climate change, and promote the health and well-being of all residents. The success of the Plan will depend on collective action and collaboration between governments, individuals, businesses, and agencies, each understanding their unique role and contribution. The Province's forthcoming *Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy* represents an opportunity for coordinating regional food system action. Food system solutions must build on the expertise of food system innovators as well as the community wisdom of our farmers and fishers, organizations, residents, and neighbours.

Together, we will act to create a just, healthy, and sustainable food system for the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Photo: Nourish NS

JustFOOD Action Plan Development

The development of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* is co-led by HRM and the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA).

Formed in 2013, the HFPA is a partnership of diverse individuals and organizations representing the food system, led by members including the Ecology Action Centre, Nova Scotia Health Public Health, Nova Scotia Health Community Health Boards - Central Zone, Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University, Feed Nova Scotia, and Halifax Public Libraries. The HFPA has over 700 supporters and 2,200 social media followers.

Overview

In 2017, the HFPA released the *HRM Food Charter*. This document envisions a food system that will strengthen the health of our people, our communities, and our ecosystems. In 2019, Halifax Regional Council endorsed the *HRM Food Charter* and committed to supporting the development of a municipal food strategy, the *JustFOOD Action Plan for the Halifax Region*.

Photo: Emily Stevens

Engagement

Public engagement for the Plan began in March 2021, with the majority of engagements wrapping up in August 2022. Engagements were designed to ensure that community concerns and aspirations were consistently understood, considered, and directly reflected in Plan recommendations. Public engagement was further intended to (1) profile the local food system; (2) identify measurable goals, priorities, and actions for the *JustFOOD Action Plan*; (3) foster relationships and readiness for action among key local partners; and (4) encourage community members to take part in food system action.

Engagement opportunities were planned in consultation with community partners. A variety of supports were provided to reduce participation barriers, and compensation was provided to community members. Some of the methods used to capture public feedback included online surveys, focus groups, community-hosted workshops, and take-home meal kits accompanied by conversation guides.

HRM AND THE HFPA ENGAGED WITH:

- **29 community-based organizations**
- **6 provincial partners**
- **9 HRM business units**
- **Thousands of HRM residents**

A summary of engagement activities can be found on page 34, and a detailed report can be found in Appendix 2.

Based on engagement feedback and food system research, HRM and the HFPA chose to structure Plan recommendations according to the pillars of the **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)**. MUFPP is an international protocol aimed at tackling food-related issues at the municipal level.

Influenced by this pact, the following principles are used to structure the *JustFOOD Action Plan*:

- **Governance**
- **Social and Economic Equity**
- **Food Production**
- **Food Supply, Processing, and Distribution**
- **Health, Wellness, and Resilience**
- **Food Waste**

The proposed recommendations associated with each of these principles are designed to mobilize community, government, and other key actors to take collaborative and coordinated action on food system issues and advance food system transformation.

Recommendations were carefully crafted using engagement feedback. Recommendations were also drafted using ongoing research and best practices from other regions. Early drafts were shared with community partners and key actors for feedback and comment.

JustFOOD Development Timeline

2013

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HFPA formed

2014

Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment released

2017

HRM Food Charter created

2019

Halifax Regional Council endorsed ***HRM Food Charter*** & co-development of the ***JustFOOD Action Plan***

2020

Early awareness building for the *JustFOOD Action Plan*

JustFOOD Framework drafted

Engagement Plan developed

2021-2022

Phase One Engagement

Virtual Workshop #1: outcomes included refined *JustFOOD Action Plan* goals, Framework 2.0, and story of JustFOOD

Virtual Workshop #2: outcomes included identification of actions for the *JustFOOD Action Plan*

500 Civic Dinner kits distributed

JustFOOD website launched

JustFOOD Survey launched

2022

Phase Two Engagement

Targeted engagement sessions held with priority populations

JustFOOD Action Plan Draft Part A circulated for partner feedback

Plan Principles and Structure

The *JustFOOD Action Plan* assigns a set of recommendations to each of the six structural principles. The aims of each principle are outlined here:

Governance recommendations aim to facilitate collaboration across government agencies and departments, align policies and programs that impact the food system, establish knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and develop strategies to monitor progress.

Social and Economic Equity recommendations aim to increase community-level food sovereignty, recognizing that significant system-level change requires a shift away from charitable models. The recommendations aim to ensure that everyone is able to produce, prepare, and access food safely and with dignity, and that food system work directly addresses racial inequities and the root causes of food insecurity.

- **African Nova Scotian Food Justice and Sovereignty** recommendations aim to celebrate the unique and vibrant food culture of the African Nova Scotian community, support strong traditions of homesteading and agriculture, and advance African Nova Scotian and Black food sovereignty.
- **Indigenous Food Justice and Sovereignty** recommendations aim to enable and support Indigenous Peoples in their right to access healthy and culturally preferred foods as well as to exercise autonomy over where and how their food is produced, harvested, hunted, and fished. Indigenous food sovereignty necessitates the right to self-determination of Indigenous food systems.

Food Production recommendations aim to support producer livelihoods and strengthen sustainable local food production by providing resources and services to urban and rural food producers, developing the infrastructure needed to support a local food system, enabling secure access to land for sustainable food production, and supporting short food chains.

Food Supply, Processing, and Distribution recommendations aim to ensure a sustainable, fair, reliable, and efficient supply and distribution of food into and within the municipality.

Health, Wellness, and Resilience recommendations aim to promote and support access to nutritious food and create the conditions for healthy food environments while promoting sustainable diets.These actions also aim to strengthen ecological resilience through improved air, water, and soil quality, and increased biodiversity. As climate change continues to threaten our food system, protecting the health of our environment is critical to strengthening community-level health and resilience.

Food Waste recommendations aim to support the municipality to sustainably manage and reduce food waste by recovering and redistributing food, raising awareness of food loss and waste, and enabling effective composting.

Next Steps

Request that Halifax Regional Council sign onto the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact

By signing on to MUFPP, HRM will join a community of cities committed to the development of:

> "Sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimize waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change."

As an official signatory, HRM will have access to an established monitoring framework to measure the impact of actions and compare progress with other jurisdictions using the same benchmarks.

Establish JustFOOD Working Groups

Following the public launch of Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*, HRM and the HFPA will establish formal JustFOOD Working Groups. These groups will be responsible for developing the implementation strategies in Part B of the Plan.

JustFOOD Working Groups will bring together a range of community and government partners with both professional and lived experience. The working-group model is a community-based, collective-impact approach to implementing key recommendations while building greater capacity for food system change in HRM. JustFOOD Working Group members will be compensated for their time and expertise; however, it is anticipated that some members' involvement may be covered by their employers.

Formalize Commitments and Develop Implementation Strategies

When Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* is released, JustFOOD Working Groups will begin to develop implementation strategies. Part B of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* will detail these implementation strategies and will include commitments to action on behalf of food system partners. A final Plan, comprising both Part A and Part B, will be brought to Halifax Regional Council for endorsement in 2023.

Photo: Snickerdoodle Photography

Form a Food Policy Council

Implementation of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* will require cross-sector governance. HRM and the HFPA propose that a Food Policy Council be created to replace the HFPA as a collaborative governing body. The proposed Food Policy Council is anticipated to act as a legal entity that will be tasked with coordinating, guiding, and evaluating the implementation of the *JustFOOD Action Plan*, which will include oversight of the JustFOOD Working Groups.

A governance report that details considerations and provides a recommended model, entitled Governance Structures for the Regional Food System in HRM, has been prepared by partners at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University (**see Appendix 1**).

Monitor Progress

Recommendations in Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* are based on the six categories of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. By signing onto MUFPP, HRM will be able to use an established monitoring framework to measure the impact of actions in the region and compare progress with other jurisdictions using the same benchmarks. The proposed Food Policy Council will track and review progress to ensure that (1) the council is operating effectively and adapting to the complex work of food system change and (2) the priority recommendations made in Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* are progressing. Monitoring steps will include:

- Publishing an annual review of a selection of *JustFOOD Action Plan* indicators
- Providing regular updates on implementation progress, including an annual update to Halifax Regional Council and a comprehensive five-year review
- Reporting interim progress online at justfoodhalifax.ca
- Using the virtual food hub to share Plan progress, identify emerging issues, and adapt recommendations based on research and ongoing discussion
- Using community-based tools for both external and internal evaluation to increase the positive impact of *JustFOOD Action Plan* on our food system while supporting citizen-driven change

First-Year Recommendations

The recommendations made in Part A of the *JustFOOD Action Plan* reflect extensive community and partner feedback as well as best practices. They are at different stages, some with significant progress like the coalition developing a business plan for the Halifax Local Food Hub, some with initial work like the beta version of the Food4All map, and many with work yet to begin.

HRM and the HFPA recognize that a Food Policy Council cannot immediately tackle every recommendation made in the Plan and that work is required to create a solid foundation for collective action, leadership, and shared responsibilities. The following table identifies 10 priority recommendations for the first year of Plan implementation.

GOAL	YEAR 1 PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS
Establish foundational food system governance mechanisms.	**1.** Establish and fund a Food Policy Council. **9d.** Use key performance indicators to monitor and evaluate Plan progress.
Establish a central repository of food system resources.	**5.** Create a virtual community food hub. **6a.** Expand the Food4All food resource map.
Support food sovereignty efforts among equity seeking communities.	**2.** Support the development of an Indigenous Food Governance Model and an African Nova Scotian Food Policy Council. Secure funding for both.
Support community-based food programs and grassroots initiatives that provide dignified access to good food.	**1b.i.** Develop a sustainable funding stream for community-based and grassroots food initiatives.
Create an enabling municipal environment for the supply, processing, and distribution of local food.	**17.** Use municipal facilities and assets to offer food programs, grow food, and support public food infrastructure. **38d.** Allow community food markets, food-distribution hubs, and stable community supported agriculture distribution sites in municipal spaces.
Support community gardens and urban farms as important sites of urban food production and social inclusion.	**32b.i.** Establish a community plots program. **32b.ii.** Create and fund a community garden and municipal food-production staff position.

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