

Groups try new ways to share the fare

The premise is up there with sherwood and apple pie. Oh, that it were as sweet and simple as pie.

"Working together to end hunger and improve access to affordable, nutritious food," reads the noble credo of FoodShare, an umbrella group for several

community-based projects.

The Toronto Food Policy Council, funded by the City of Toronto, is what FoodShare's executive director, Debbie Field, calls

its "forum for debate." Its equally lofty goal is "to reduce

levels of hunger in Toronto and to eat a healthy and environmentally sound food system."

Sound kind of pie-in-the-sky? Especially in a city where more than 4,000 people use food banks every

month. You be the judge.

Communal effort
FoodShare, which is Metro-wide, is needed to the tune of \$80,000 a year.



LUNCH BREAK: A nutritious meal is served at Dundas public school as part of FoodShare's subsidized school food programs.

KEN FAUGHT/TORONTO STAR

Half of this money comes from charitable donations, the rest about equally from several levels of government and various foundations. Its impetus, says Field, is "people coming together and relying on each other," a result of "the crisis of the '90s — namely a realization that we don't want governments to do it for us."

FoodShare's plan is a pretty ambitious one. It talks of changing the political and economic situation as it

affects "food security" with the aim of overhauling the food distribution system in this city. Eventually that would expand to mean the province and then — who knows? — perhaps the country.

This boils down to what Field describes as "grass-roots projects" that "focus on communities coming together to take back some control over their access to food." Such projects include bulk buying

clubs, community kitchens, school nutrition programs, community gardens and community markets.

Field reckons that about 150,000 people in Metro make use of some facet of FoodShare every year.

That also includes the eight-year-old Hunger Hotline, which is kept busy by folks wanting to know how to connect with their nearest food bank, and the fairly well established school food programs which, for the past 2½ years, have been doing an excellent job of helping schools organize subsidized breakfasts, snacks and lunches in all kinds of neighborhoods throughout the city.

Then there are the more innovative (Field admits some are still "experimental"), fledgling projects in various stages of operation that have been inspired by the Toronto Food Policy Council and currently are operated by FoodShare.

Farm fresh

The year-old Field to Table is one of FoodShare's fledgling and pet projects. "It's a real breakthrough," says Field. "It makes us a non-profit distributor of food."

The food in question is fresh produce. Mostly local, preferably organically grown fruit and veggies are bought daily from the Ontario Food

Terminal and then delivered spots around the city (mostly low-income housing projects) for various reasons, such as difficult to obtain at reasons. It is then sold by volunteers in neighborhood for about one than at your average superm

So far, there are only 18 Field to Table projects operating across Metro. As FoodShare's buyer of produce for them all, Mary Lou Morgan, who started the highly successful Big Carrot health emporium) admits, "We're

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INSIDE

RECIPES

Butterscotch Almond Sauce

Fresh Strawberry Sauce

Honeydew in Rosemary Syrup

Jambalaya

Peanut Butter Honey Sauce

Slice of Lemon Pie

Feeding needy a shared goal

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to find out what works."

Field has high hopes.

"Eventually, we hope Field to

Table will involve a central

warehouse supplied directly by

local farmers that will cut out

the middlemen in the food

distribution system and give

low-income people access to

good food."

So far, she admits, the project

is "experimental" and part of "a

very slow process."

In the long run, however, she

does see it as part of an

alternative to food banks —

the latter being a phenomenon that

most of us, including those who

operate and those who use

them, realize has many flaws

and is in danger of becoming an

odious institution.

Food for thought

In my opinion, the best of

FoodShare's projects are the

ones that operate in schools.

After all, what better place to

start (and I'm talking about

starting small) than with the

young?

Insisting, as the kindergarten

teacher at my daughter's school

does, that kids bring a healthy

snack (a bottle of juice costs no

more than a can of pop) is often

a good lesson for both child and

parent.

It's now well known that a

child who eats well tends to

learn well — hence the benefits

of subsidized food programs in

schools.

Community kitchens are

another good idea. There are

currently about 30 of them in

Metro and that number is

quickly growing.

"It's a non-intimidating way

to share life experiences," says

Andrea Thoery, an outreach

worker for Parkdale Focus who works with the Moms' Support Program that gathers to cook

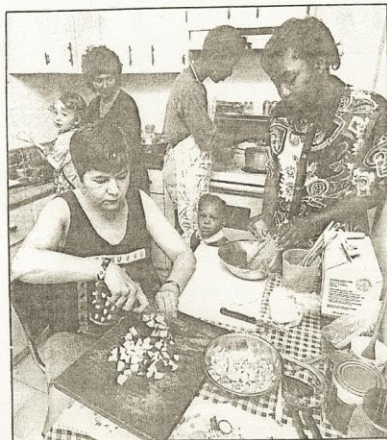
Food with spirit

This weekend's Earth Spirit Festival at Harbourfront focuses

on the music, art and, of course, food, of the aboriginal, Chinese and Japanese peoples of Canada.

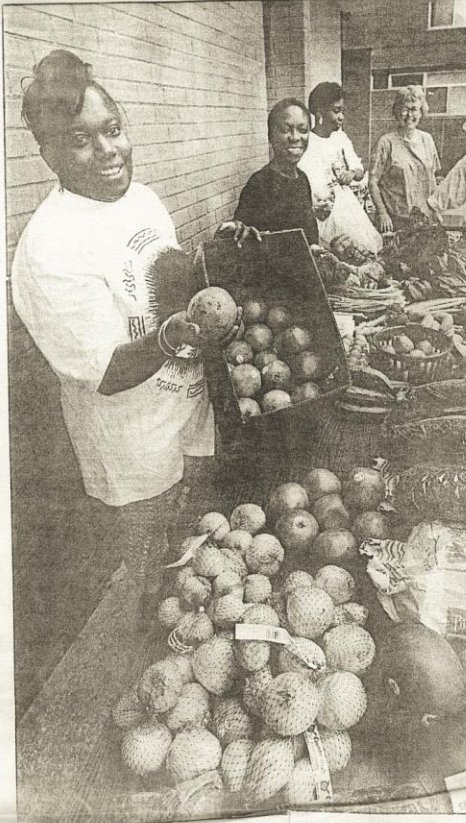
Get a taste of wild rice, native tacos, corn soup, spring rolls, bannock and blanket dogs, all prepared by local folks who are pros at cooking their native fare.

The fest starts Friday and ends Sunday evening. For more info, call 973-3000.



RIK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR

WORKING TOGETHER: In a Parkdale community kitchen, outreach worker Julia Wolf chops vegetables with moms Donna Dearlove, right, Billie Perrin with Drake, 2, at sink, and Myronia Joseph with Eshi, 2. In the Field to Table project, Gileta Rennie shows off some produce being sold in Etobicoke.



(and eat) healthy, inexpensive dishes once a week at Shaolin House in that neighborhood.

In Kensington Market, a group of men has organized a similar communal cooking venture. And in the Church-Wellesley area downtown, a group of people living with AIDS is working to do likewise with the aim of preparing special meals.

Here are some phone numbers for those interested in FoodShare projects:

- FoodShare general inquiries and Hunger Hotline: 392-1659
- Community kitchens, community gardens, food buying clubs: 392-6652
- Field to Table: 392-1658.
- School food programs: 392-1629.

Watch this space

In next week's column, I will describe some projects happening in the United States that I heard about at the recent Food Marketing Institute convention in Chicago.

These include some very successful co-operative efforts