

# Durham Food Policy Council – Stakeholder Survey

January 2019



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Research Approach .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Results.....</b>	<b>2</b>
3.1	Characteristics of Survey Respondents.....	2
3.2	Strongest Features of Durham’s Food System.....	4
3.3	Challenges with Durham’s Food System.....	5
3.4	Priorities Identified by Survey Respondents.....	6
3.5	Mechanisms to Reach Priorities.....	7
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Familiarity with DFPC .....</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1	Awareness of DFPC and the Durham Food Charter.....	9
4.2	Future Engagement with DFPC .....	9
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Next Steps .....</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>Appendix A: Survey Questions.....</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Appendix B: Survey Respondent Organizations .....</b>	<b>13</b>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC) was established in 2010 as a community-based group of individuals and organizations dedicated to supporting a just and sustainable food system in Durham Region. It is mandated by the Durham Region Food Charter, endorsed by the Region of Durham in 2009, which reflects the community's vision for a food secure Durham Region. The Vision of the DFPC is "[a] food secure Durham Region that is financially sound, environmentally responsible, and socially just, contributing to the future well-being for our region and residents".

An important part of DFPC's work is to listen to stakeholders across Durham Region's food system on priority areas for action. A "food system" can be generally defined as all food-related activities from growing to eating – including farming/food production, processing, distributing food (retail, farmers markets, food hubs, transportation etc.), consumption (including food security, food skills, raising awareness about local food etc.), and disposing of food-related waste. Food system stakeholders therefore include food producers, processors, distributors, consumers, educators, food security advocates, waste managers and more.

In the fall of 2018, DFPC circulated an on-line survey to these food system stakeholders in order to learn more about the successes and challenges of our food system directly from those involved day to day. The overall purpose of the survey was to inform DFPC's strategic planning on where the DFPC should direct efforts to advocate for positive change and support those working in and relying on Durham's food system.

This report provides a summary of the results from this stakeholder survey, including an overview of respondents, key strengths of Durham's food system, specific challenges, and priority areas for attention.

## 2.0 RESEARCH APPROACH

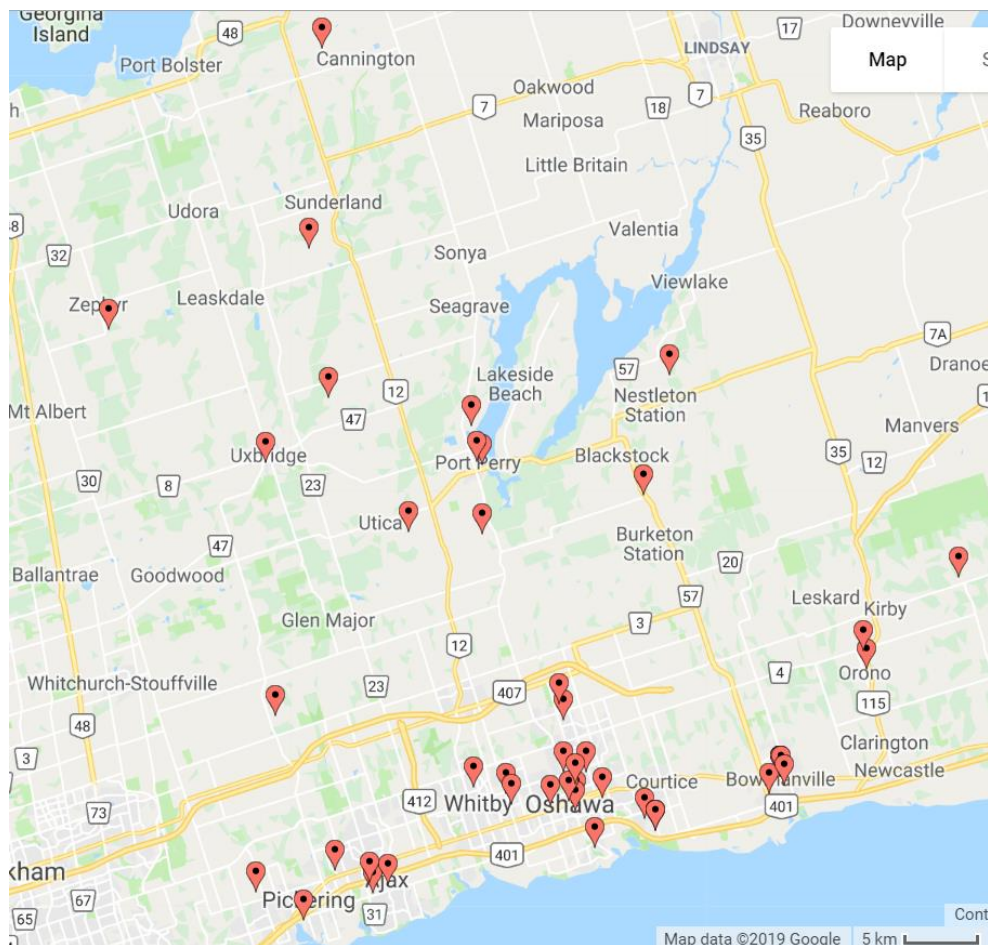
A list of food system stakeholders in Durham Region was compiled from past and current DFPC members and contacts (e.g. from events and e-mail list-serves) and a desk-top review to fill in interest area gaps. The final stakeholder list included 400 individuals or organizations representing interests in agriculture and rural issues, business, community development, education, environment, food security, and health, in addition to municipal staff, political representatives, and faith-based institutions. The survey was sent electronically to the list of 400 food system stakeholders.

The online survey consisted of close and open-ended questions on the strengths of Durham's food system, challenges, priority areas, descriptive questions to characterize respondents, and questions to assess awareness of the DFPC and Durham's Food Charter (see Appendix A for survey questions). The survey ran from September 26<sup>th</sup> to October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018. To accommodate agricultural stakeholders, who notified the DFPC that many were too busy with harvest activities at the time of the survey to respond, the survey was re-issued for two weeks from November 23 to December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

## 3.0 RESULTS

### 3.1 Characteristics of Survey Respondents

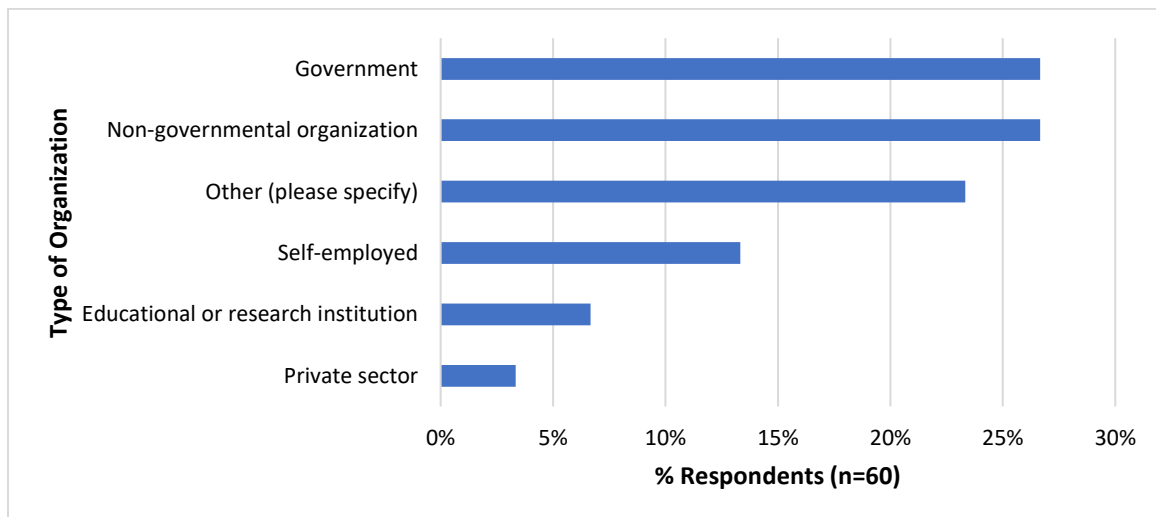
A total of 60 organizations and individuals responded to the survey. With the survey distributed to approximately 400 stakeholder e-mails, this results in a survey response rate of 15%. Survey respondents came from across Durham Region, although a higher proportion of responses originated from the southern part of the Region (Figure 1; note that not all respondents provided a postal code). In the case where respondents were comfortable providing the name of their organization, these organizations are listed in Appendix B.



**Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Responses Across Durham Region**

### *Type of Organization*

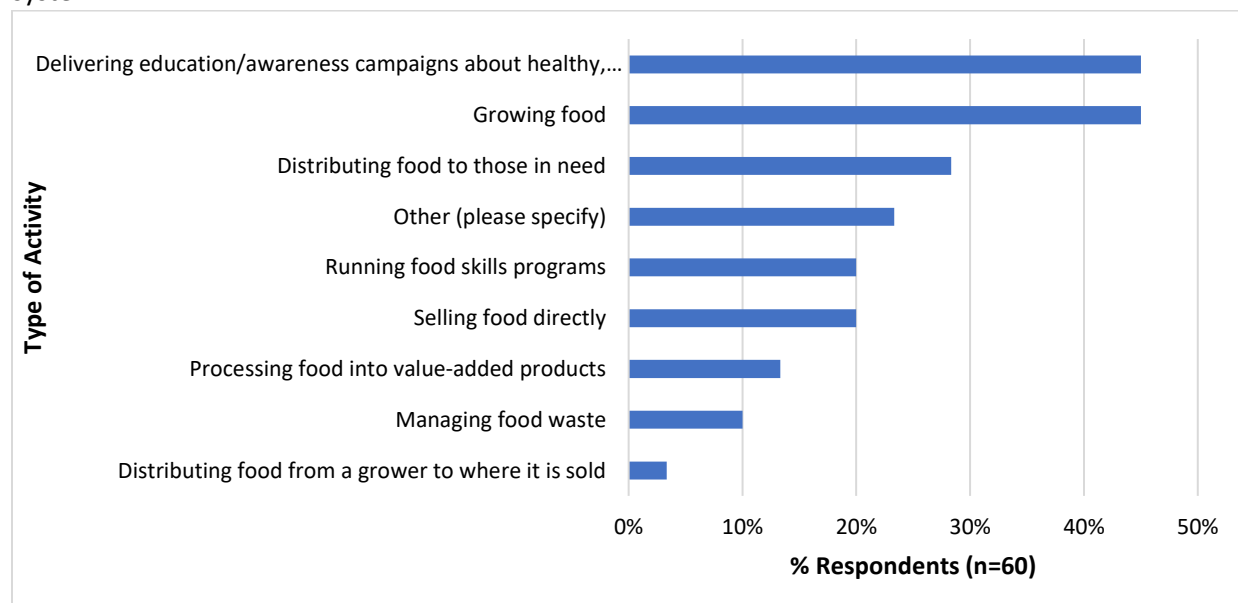
The majority of respondents identified themselves as part of government or non-government organizations (Figure 2). The “other” category included faith-based organizations (churches, charitable religious organizations), farms, and self-categorization as hospitality, not-for-profit charities, health care institutions/centres, and membership-based marketing associations.



**Figure 2: Type of Organization Self-Identified by DFPC Survey Respondents**

### *Type of Activities Conducted*

The top three types of activities organizations/individuals responding to the survey engaged in included: 1) delivery of education/awareness campaigns about healthy, equitable, and/or local food, 2) growing food, and 3) distributing food to those in need (Figure 3). Note that respondents were able to check off more than one category, and many organizations engage in multiple activities related to the food system.



**Figure 3: Types of Activities Carried out by Survey Respondents/Organizations**

Activities provided in the “Other” category included:

- Child nutrition
- Municipal land use planning and policy
- Municipal Council
- Mitigating risk/building resilience of climate change on the food system
- Providing support and funding to programs
- Protection of agricultural land
- Advocating for a just food system
- Donating food for use by organizations who distribute food to those in need
- Outreach preparing and serving daily meals
- Food inspection
- Distributing remaining food from events, providing food to isolated individuals, and charity dinners

### 3.2 Strongest Features of Durham’s Food System

*What would you say are the most successful or strongest features of Durham Region’s food system if you were to describe it to someone from outside the Region?*

When asked about the strongest features of Durham Region’s Food System, survey respondents overwhelmingly described Durham’s **agricultural assets** with almost two-thirds (62%) of those who responded to this question noting this as Durham’s strongest feature. The following agricultural assets were noted:

- The amount of agricultural land under cultivation or pasture as a natural asset;
- The large amount of farms in the area;
- The diversity and amount of fresh produce and products grown/made in the Region (meats, fruits, processed value-added products);
- The proximity of urban areas in the Region to farmland and number of locally-grown outlets, increasing access to local farms and local produce;
- Class 1 soil;
- The strong history of agriculture in the region;
- The large contribution of agriculture to the Region’s economy;
- The farmers that work the agricultural land;
- Agri-food businesses and other infrastructure supporting the food system;
- Collaboration among growers and willingness to share knowledge;
- Growers as advocates for building trust with customers; and
- A strong representation of locally grown food through farms, markets, farm stands and restaurants that use locally grown produce.

Other features of Durham Region's food system that were noted as strong or successful included:

- **Emergency food provision** – notably the strong network of agencies that provide food to those in need across the region and divert food waste in the process, and the communication and cooperation that occurs between those groups. Feed the Need in Durham was especially praised for securing and distributing food.
- **Food-related education programs** – including the Durham College Centre for Food, education programs on healthy eating, Durham Farm Fresh, and the promotion of local food, local farms and “buy local”.
- **Municipal and regional support** – including Durham's commitment to its producers and local economy, the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC), the Region of Durham's climate change mitigation/resilience work, and general Council and Regional support for food issues.

### 3.3 Challenges with Durham's Food System

*In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges with Durham Region's food system?*

The top challenges with Durham Region's food system noted by respondents included:

1. **Food Access** – the challenge of getting food to those in need was the top challenge noted by respondents. This was explained in terms of both lack of financial and physical access to healthy food. In terms of financial access to food, respondents noted the challenges people experience in affording healthy food, especially for low-income families whether or not they are on social assistance; that due to lack of affordable housing in the Region individuals and families reduce their spending on food to meet housing costs, increasing their reliance on food banks; and that in the small rural communities where there are no affordable grocery chains, it is difficult for someone on a limited income to access healthy options. In terms of physical access to food, respondents noted challenges for individuals finding transportation to get to food banks, especially those with limited operating hours and days, and that not all residents can physically access locally grown food in their community or get to farmers markets or farms.
2. **Impact of urban development on farmland** – key challenges noted included the pressure of urban development occupying prime productive farm land and the associated rising cost of this land pushing out farmers; concerns about loosening rules in the Greenbelt facilitating its development and loss of agricultural land; and the challenge of protecting farmland for production and having successive farmers to continue producing on that land.
3. **Public awareness and engagement** – challenges included increasing public awareness and motivating more residents to regularly buy locally grown food as well as getting people better connected to and engaged with farms and volunteering in the food system.
4. **Food distribution from producers to local operations** – respondents noted it is a challenge to distribute food quickly to local venues such as restaurants and institutions, especially for small to medium-sized producers. It was also noted that food banks find it challenging acquiring fresh food, especially products that spoil quickly (milk, eggs, butter, meat).



Other challenges with Durham's food system that were noted included:

- Reducing food waste;
- Connecting local farmers to resources available to build local capacity;
- Competing rules and policies for producers between municipal (zoning and bylaws), regional (department of health), provincial (food safety regulations, taxation, environmental protections) and federal (food inspection, labeling) making it difficult for producers to find new revenue streams and keep their business viable;
- A lack of collective voice and restrictive policy for urban agriculture, and insufficient attention to opportunities with urban agriculture and climate change;
- Improving local community sustainability to reduce reliance on food imports;
- Lack of a region-wide plan for food access during weather-related emergencies and an over-reliance on grocery stores and the current food distribution system;
- The need for standardized food handling codes and making food handling courses more accessible; and
- Getting food organizations to work collaboratively instead of competitively.

### 3.4 Priorities Identified by Survey Respondents

*What would you suggest is the number one priority that needs to be addressed in Durham's food system in the short-term (next 3 years)?*

Three key priorities emerged from survey responses, and in some cases respondents included suggestions on how to address the priority.

1. **Getting food to people who need it** - improving food security and physical and financial access to get food to those in need.

#### Suggestions to Address

- Encourage those who donate through grocery stores to provide more fresh produce when available, particularly in the middle of the month;
  - Embed food access, especially in priority areas, into the Region of Durham's emergency response system;
  - Increase storage availability to enable storage of larger donations of food and expand distribution/delivery system;
  - Use refrigerated trucks to distribute items such as milk, cheese and eggs;
  - Develop a better system for those in need to benefit from "leftovers" at events; team up donors and recipients;
  - Engage people in community kitchens to prepare healthy meals with fresh food.
2. **Increasing public education and awareness about food and agriculture** – including educating the public, businesses, and organizations to increase awareness about: the food system, where food comes from, costs of our food system, challenges facing farmers, critical food system issues, the benefits of local agriculture from economic and environmental perspectives, how to support the local food system, reducing food waste, and selecting healthy and local food options.



- 3. Preserving agricultural land and helping farmers** – reducing development of farm land, promoting local food to support local farms and farmers financially, reducing challenges with regulations, increasing productivity and yield on farms, providing training and capacity building for farmers, and promoting the agriculture industry as a viable career option.

Other priorities that were mentioned with less frequency included:

- Reducing food waste;
- Supporting a sustainable food system;
- Expanding urban agriculture through funding for community gardens, small-scale farming, and schools;
- Food safety;
- Improved distribution;
- Omitting GMO products;
- Increasing access to the internet; and
- Attracting business to the region

### 3.5 Mechanisms to Reach Priorities

*What, in your opinion, needs to happen to address the priorities and challenges you mentioned and advance change in Durham Region's food system?*

Respondents provided a diversity of suggestions on how to address the priorities and challenges noted in previous answers. These are grouped below by the main challenge or priority previously discussed.

**Increasing public education and awareness about food and agriculture**

- Increase awareness, education and outreach to give food a higher public priority and expand understanding of the issue
- Continual discussion
- Educate on the importance of growing a diversity of food items for food security, to grow the local economy, and for improved resilience
- Deliver a Regional-wide marketing campaign
- Promote the importance of local food and advertise local farms and farmers
- Increase media coverage
- Educate on food waste and reduction
- Support Durham Farm Connections and their educational programs
- Engage in social media marketing targeted at youth and young families
- Provide insightful information for people to make their food purchase and nutrition decisions based on easily understandable scientific facts

<b>Getting food to people who need it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate food donors about individual needs of clients in specific food banks, e.g. through a spokesperson from each agency</li> <li>• Expand collective co-operative garden</li> <li>• Decrease the stigma of accessing food banks</li> <li>• Increased and long-term funding to charities providing food assistance</li> <li>• Improve food literacy, food budgeting, and food preparation through home economics in grade school</li> <li>• Investigate mechanisms to assist the working poor</li> <li>• Automated streamlined systems to monitor food chain supply in food banks</li> <li>• Embed food access into the Region's emergency response system, including a volunteer based group/organization trained for specific roles supporting an "Emergency Food Access Response" in the case of a weather related emergency</li> <li>• Increase operating hours of food banks so they can be accessed more frequently</li> <li>• <i>More controlled environments for food (?)</i></li> <li>• Explore option of distributing food directly to local food stores for clients to access as opposed to going to food banks</li> </ul>
<b>Preserving agricultural land and helping farmers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit urban encroachment on farm land and preserve agricultural land</li> <li>• Provide government support to farmers, especially in relation to crop problems due to climate change</li> <li>• Remove tolls on 412 and 418 extensions to move products</li> <li>• Support a living wage for farmers</li> <li>• Provide more food handler courses in person and on-line</li> <li>• Encourage the university and college to promote local products by creating new ways to use what we grow in Durham</li> <li>• Secure high speed internet across all of Durham</li> <li>• Provide labour cost subsidies for growers</li> <li>• Ensure regulations that encourage farmers to diversify and stay profitable along with assistance in interpreting these regulations</li> </ul>
<b>Reducing food waste</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve coordination in saving edible supermarket food</li> <li>• Educate the public on food waste and elimination of food waste</li> <li>• Improve advocacy and advertising on where food can be taken to churches and halls to reduce food waste</li> </ul>
<b>Engagement and Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the local food system is a priority for government, institutions, policy makers, and the public</li> <li>• Engage the public</li> <li>• Encourage small efforts of coordination across all areas of local food</li> <li>• Encourage collaboration between parties and sharing of information</li> <li>• Increase communication and break down barriers between agencies</li> <li>• Collaboration between all three levels of government</li> </ul>

## 4.0 FAMILIARITY WITH DFPC

### 4.1 Awareness of DFPC and the Durham Food Charter

Half of survey respondents were familiar with the Durham Food Policy Council before the survey (50%, n=60). Similarly, 50% of respondents were aware that Durham Region had a Food Charter.

The most common mechanism through which respondents had heard of the DFPC, in order, included:

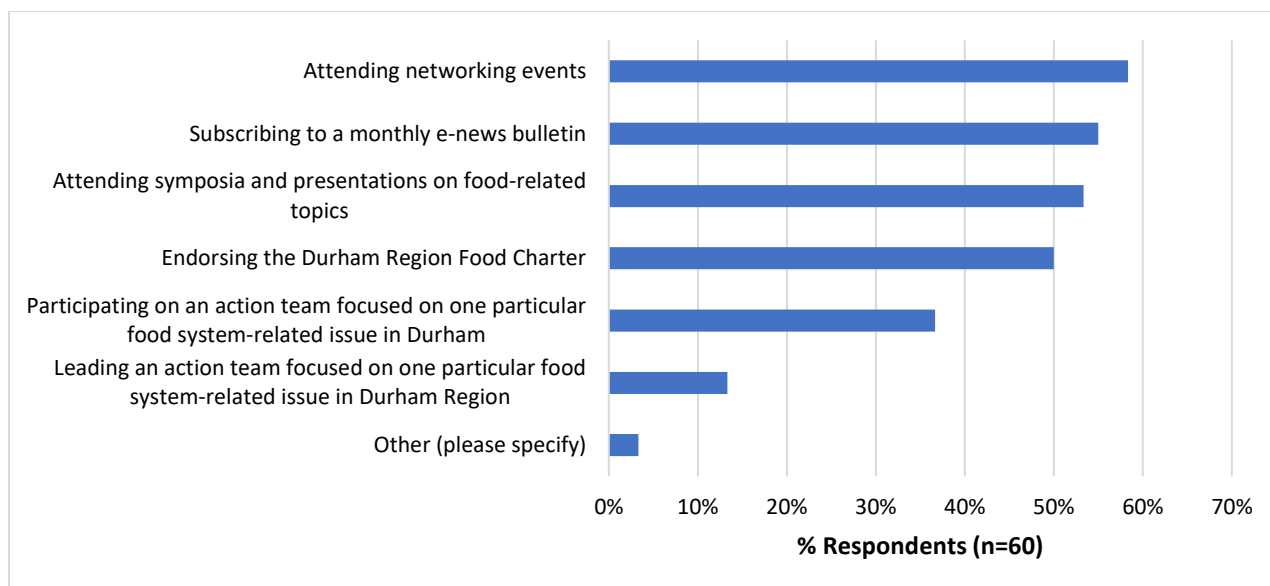
- **Through work with other organizations** – and the networking with DFPC that resulted from that work. Specific organizations noted included the Durham Region Farming Association, Durham Integrated Growers, Durham College, the Food Security Task Force Durham, Environmental Advisory Committee, Feed the Need, Uxbridge Council, and Durham Region.
- **Through direct engagement with the DFPC** – including being part of the team that developed the Food Charter, being involved in the formative stages of the DFPC, through past involvement on DFPC committees, through general staff involvement, and through a workshop run by DFPC.
- **Through word of mouth** – from conversations with predecessors, Regional staff, and co-workers and knowledge of other stakeholders connected to the DFPC.
- **Through social media** – including e-mail blasts, seminar advertisements, and the DIG Twitter account.

Additionally, one respondent heard about the DFPC through a sustainable food course, and another stays abreast of policy that concerns agriculture and specifically follow DFPC as one of their agencies of interest.

### 4.2 Future Engagement with DFPC

When asked how they could see themselves or their organization engage with DFPC in the future, the most popular responses were to attend networking events, subscribe to a regular e-bulletin or newsletter, attend symposia or food-related seminars put on by the DFPC, and endorse the Durham Food Charter (Figure 4). While some respondents were interested in participating on an Action Team (37%), much fewer could see themselves leading an Action Team (13%). This may in part be due to lack of knowledge of what would be expected of them in this role.

Responses in the “other” category included “none of the above”, an interest in learning what the Food Charter is, note that the organization works more with agencies that directly assist with food security in their community, and that the organization/individual would like to work with DFPC through existing agencies.



**Figure 4: Mechanism through which respondents could see themselves engaging with DFPC in the future**

## 5.0 NEXT STEPS

With the results of this survey, DFPC will develop a short-term strategic plan that identifies specific areas of focus to help food system stakeholders and advocate for positive change. DFPC will continue to consult with food system stakeholders, organize information sessions and networking events, and communicate about the successes and challenges of Durham Region's food system with stakeholders and the public.

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

The Durham Region Food Policy Council (DFPC) is a non-profit group of individuals and organizations dedicated to supporting a just and sustainable food system in Durham Region.

DFPC is conducting this survey to learn more about the successes and challenges of Durham Region's food system from those who are on the ground and part of this food system.

We consider a "food system" as all food-related activities from growing to eating – including farming/food production, processing, distributing food (retail, farmers markets, food hubs, transportation etc.), consumption (including food security, food skills, raising awareness about local food etc.), and disposing of food-related waste.

What we learn from this survey will help the DFPC better support those working in and relying on Durham's food system and advocate for positive change. We appreciate your input!

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**1. In which of the following areas would you place your/your organization's activities (check all that apply)?**

- ☐ Growing food
- ☐ Processing food into value-added products
- ☐ Distributing food from a grower to where it is sold
- ☐ Distributing food to those in need
- ☐ Selling food directly
- ☐ Running food skills programs
- ☐ Delivering education/awareness campaigns about healthy, equitable, and/or local food
- ☐ Managing food waste
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. As what type of organization would you most identify yourself/your organization?**

- ☐ Government
- ☐ Non-governmental organization
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Educational or research institution
- ☐ Private sector
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**3. If you are comfortable doing so, please provide the name of your organization: \_\_\_\_\_**

**4. Before this questionnaire, had you heard of the Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC)?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**5. If yes, how did you come to know the Durham Food Policy Council?**

6. Did you know Durham Region has a Food Charter?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
7. What would you say are the most successful or strongest features of Durham Region's food system if you were to describe it to someone from outside the Region?
8. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges with Durham Region's food system?
9. What would you suggest is the number one priority that needs to be addressed in Durham's food system in the short-term (next 3 years)?
10. What, in your opinion, needs to happen to address the priorities and challenges you mentioned and advance change in Durham Region's food system?
11. How could you see yourself/your organization getting involved in the Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC) (check all that apply)?
- ☐ Attending networking events
- ☐ Attending symposia and presentations on food-related topics
- ☐ Subscribing to a monthly e-news bulletin
- ☐ Participating on an action team focused on one particular food system-related issue in Durham
- ☐ Leading an action team focused on one particular food system-related issue in Durham Region
- ☐ Endorsing the Durham Region Food Charter
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
12. If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a member of DFPC please provide your e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your input! For more information about the DFPC please visit:

<https://www.durhamfoodpolicycouncil.com/>

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESPONDENT ORGANIZATIONS

<p><b><i>Community Development, Food Security</i></b>          Ajax Pickering Womens' Centre          Bethesda House          Community Development Council Durham          DCNP (Durham Child Nutrition Project)          Durham Integrated Growers          Food Security Task Force – Region of Durham          Girls Incorporated of Durham          Land Over Landings          The Salvation Army - Oshawa          The Nourish and Develop Foundation          YWCA Durham          We Grow Food</p> <p><b><i>Agricultural Sector</i></b>          Coopers CSA Farm          Dairy Farmers of Ontario          Dare2dream farm sweet dream food Inc.          Durham Farm Connections          Durham Farm Fresh          Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association          Durham Region Federation of Agriculture          Forsythe Family Farms 2009 Inc          Nature's Bounty Farm          Tulach Ard Farm</p> <p><b><i>Educational Institutions</i></b>          Durham College          Walter E Harris Public School</p>	<p><b><i>Municipalities</i></b>          City of Oshawa          City of Pickering          Municipality of Clarington          Regional Municipality of Durham          Township of Brock          Uxbridge Township</p> <p><b><i>Faith-based organizations</i></b>          All Saint's Anglican Church, Whitby          Durham Outlook          Forest Brook Community Church          Gate 3:16 Outreach Centre          Kedron United Church          Newcastle United Church          Port Perry United Church          St. Martin's Anglican Church, Pickering</p> <p><b><i>Health and Wellness</i></b>          Brock Community Health Centre          Carea Community Health Centre          Community Mental Health Association (CMHA) of          Durham - Assertive Community Treatment Team          Regional Municipality of Durham - Health          Department          Regional Municipality of Durham - Social Services</p> <p><b><i>Other</i></b>          Civeo (?)</p>
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