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COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

This Community Food Justice Research Project was carried out in 2021 by the **Peel Food Action Council**

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PEEL FOOD ACTION COUNCIL

This work was funded by the 2019-2021 Community Food System Grant from the United Way Greater Toronto. Research was carried out by TANEJA CONSULTING INC. & ARORA RESEARCH & CONSULTING.

> This report was revised by Ben Reid-Howells & designed by Natali Montilla Euale of IKAKE RISING



IKAKERISING.ORG

To the wonderful people who call this LAND their HOME,

On behalf of the **Peel Food Action Council**, we are proud to share our 2021 **Food Justice Community Voices Research Project** and this resulting Report and Toolkit.

This project has been in development for some time and is the shared accomplishment of many passionate Peel residents, food justice advocates and allies. It is intended to be a toolkit, a guide and a critical reflection of our current food system, as well as a collective call for change from the diverse, grassroots voices of Peel Region.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the many amazing people without whom this project would not have become a reality: our fantastic council of individuals and organizations at PFAC; Peel Region; the United Way of Greater Toronto; Taneja Consulting; Ikake Rising; the incredibly important Peer Researchers; and every Peel community member who offered their time and commitment to helping us bring their voice to this platform, and to the wider Peel Region community.

WE HOPE THIS WORK PROVOKES THOUGHT, DIALOGUE AND ACTION.

We as Peel's Food Action Council strive to amplify the voices of the people of Peel Region and advocate to decision-makers, as we continue to work within a food justice framework for the regeneration of the land, water and all beings and people.

Yaw' Ko, Thank you! Our warmest wishes. All power to all people,

- Celeste Smith & Ahmed Mirza PFAC Core Council



HOW TO USE THIS REPORT



SEE HOW WE DID IT

Read the **Intro section** to see how we made this Community Voices research project happen: a **model you can adapt and use for community-led research projects for food justice in your own community.**



READ THE STORIES OF PEEL COMMUNITY VOICES

And hear from parents, urban gardeners, food producers and more about the issues and opportunities for change in Peel's food system.



JUMP TO THE ACTION ITEMS

See this report's findings about: 1/ How **POLICIES** related to **FOOD JUSTICE** need to change in Peel; 2/ How **GOVERNMENT** needs to make **URBAN FARMING** more accessible.



READ PEEL'S DEFINITION OF FOOD JUSTICE

See the Graphic Map of What Food Justice Means to Peel.

TOOLS FOR ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

This research project represents voices of the people of Peel, and highlights the needs for change to bring about greater food justice across Peel Region.



THIS IS YOUR TOOL to advocate for that change.

Find the graphic images of this report **here**: <u>peelfoodcouncil.ca</u> **PRINT** them out and bring them to your workplace / community garden / municipal government office and **make your voice heard**, with the support of the many voices and findings of this project.







SO-CALLED CANADA

The Canadian nation-state is an ongoing colonial project, built on the extraction of natural resources and the displacement of Indigenous peoples, to benefit a capitalist system and a white supremacist agenda. By calling this land "Canada" we continue to erase the Indigenous Nations whose land we occupy, and which pre-date so-called "Canada" by hundreds of thousands of years.

FOOD DESERTS, FOOD SWAMPS & FOOD APARTHEIDS

Deserts and swamps (aka. wetlands), are both important ecosystems that support human life in different ways. But when talking about access to food, a **food desert** is a neighbourhood with very few options for healthy food; a **food swamp** is a neighbourhood full of options for unhealthy food; while **food apartheid** is a term that recognizes that both food deserts and food swamps are mostly created intentionally for BIPOC neighbourhoods as a way to maintain control over racialized, marginalized communities. **"People who are hungry are easier to control." - Awiiyuk.**

BIPOC

BIPOC stands for **Black, Indigenous, and people of colour**. Pronounced "bye-pock," this term centres the experiences of BIPOC groups and highlights the solidarity between communities of colour.

FOOD JUSTICE, FOOD SOVEREIGNTY & FOOD SECURITY

Food justice is about where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed, eaten and shared. **Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system**, addressing the inherently unsustainable, extractivist, capitalist, racist nature of today's global food system that feeds most of us here in Peel.

Food justice efforts are generally led by BIPOC communities and work not only for access to healthy food, but for an end to the structural injustices of who owns, controls and works the land, what kind of food traditions are valued; how white supremacy and colonialism affect our food system and more.

Food sovereignty is a vision of dismantling the current global, corporate food system, and creating an alternative where the people who produce, distribute, and consume food also control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution, and exercise community rights to water, land and seeds.

Food security on the other hand, is a more mainstream, institutional, capitalist approach to ensuring that countries can maintain access to the food they need, regardless of the larger political and ecological injustices surrounding how that food gets to them.

INTRODUCTION ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



The Peel Food Action Council would like to express our gratitude and respect for the privilege to work and live on the Territory of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples. **This area is governed by the Dish With One Spoon and the Two Row Wampum Belt Covenant, and as such we are bound by those agreements** to live in Peace, Friendship and Respect with each other and the land we rely on for our survival.

As guests on this land, we acknowledge the ongoing process and outcomes of colonization, including food injustice and unequal access to opportunities for food production, and our important responsibility to support initiatives and policies that contribute to the decolonization of our food system here in Peel.



We would like to thank and acknowledge the efforts and insights of the project's Peer Researchers (left to right):

Jimmy Issa, Yasmin Husen, Camellia Shackleton, Simran Sandhu, Tamara McCallum-Nadon, Hunyah Irfan , Karenveer Pannu and Titilope Fafowora.

Thank you for your critical eye, your guidance and your support, that were invaluable to this work. Furthermore, a big thank you to the Peel Food Action Council (PFAC) Food Justice Research Project members for their feedback and sharing their perspectives on the research methodologies used and on the drafting of this report.

The Consultant Team was led by Taneja Consulting Inc. and we would like to express gratitude to research partner and consultant Herleen Arora, for her support and dedication to this project.



INTRODUCTION SUMMARY



This research project shifts the conversation in Peel from

FOOD SECURITY to FOOD JUSTICE

It focuses on systems and understands that **food is a human right**, centred on the decision-making **power of people** to define how to access their culturally appropriate foods. In this work we understand that

HUNGER IS A PROBLEM OF FOOD GOVERNANCE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION & SYSTEMIC INJUSTICES

AND IS NOT DUE TO A LACK OF FOOD PRODUCTION.

This conversation shows the **interconnectedness of all players in the food system** and the relationships between communities, power structures, nature and sustainability.

The purpose of this research project was to work collaboratively with Peel Region residents on a community food assessment and participatory action-research-project to gather Peel food stories. These stories in turn help us understand the current food programs, community food needs, service gaps and opportunities for change. Through this project we engaged residents as Peer Researchers and together we co-developed the methodologies and data collection tools, hosted community conversations, and analyzed emerging themes from the data. Resident engagement was a guiding principle in this project that encouraged more involvement in Peel's local food systems and **engaged equity-seeking groups as leaders in food system change**. In the end, this project has helped to build community capacity and develop a better understanding of food justice, and injustice across Peel.

The findings of this report are based on literature reviews that focused on identifying **the missing voices** in talking about food issues in Peel. And **these less-heard from communities were our focus for the community conversations that informed this work.**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we developed a digital engagement strategy that included leveraging social media channels and hosting online conversations, with the support of Peer Researchers and members of PFAC. This virtual strategy reached more than 40 residents, service and food providers, and food justice advocates: the voices behind this report.

INTRODUCTION FINDINGS

The findings that have emerged from this research are not new to the community – our communities have been naming the same challenges and gaps for years. However, through this research we have been able to deepen and broaden our understanding of the impacts of these challenges and gaps. Findings suggest that they are more complicated than we thought and require a systems approach to develop solutions that include diverse voices, and most importantly, requires our attention now as the impacts of the pandemic have done nothing but widen the gaps and increase these challenges. We need to keep looking into, advocating for and working towards:

MORE ACCESSIBLE & AFFORDABLE LAND FOR LOCAL FARMING with special support for systemically excluded communities: ie. BIPOC.

MORE ACCESSIBLE & AFFORDABLE LOCALLY GROWN FOODS because these are healthier and more sustainable.

CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT POLICY & HOW PEEL DOES DEVELOPMENT from seeing green spaces as development opportunities, to seeing them as opportunities to feed residents, and to build infrastructure for caring, well nourished, connected, joyful residents.

WELL SUPPORTED INITIATIVES & CAMPAIGNS TO EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ABOUT THE FOOD SYSTEM IN PEEL AND HOW TO ENGAGE WITH IT.

GOVERNMENTAL RECOGNITION AND POLICY-CHANGE THAT REFLECTS HOW RESIDENTS CONNECT WITH FOOD NOT ONLY FOR SUSTENANCE but for joy, pleasure and to connect with community, heritage, identity and culture.

PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE REAL COST OF GROWING & PRODUCING FOOD.

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INTRODUCTION FINDINGS (PART 2)

DEEL FOOD ACTION COUNCIL

We need to keep looking into, advocating for and working towards:



FOOD RELIEF PROGRAMMING BASED IN JUSTICE, NOT CHARITY

shifting from a one-size-fits-all model of services like Food Banks, to a model that reflects the diverse needs and experiences of Peel's residents.



RE-CENTERING AND RESPECTING INDIGENOUS SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE,

wellbeing and land stewardship, and ways of living that honour, respect and heal the land, as well as respecting the Treaties that govern this land that we call Peel.



RECOGNITION OF THE PRE-COLONIAL PRACTICES OF BIPOC COMMUNITIES around **food to connect with land,** cultural knowledge, cosmology and identity, and the diverse cultural meanings of farming, using foods and plants as medicines, and accessing and sharing foods.



JUST ACCESS TO FOOD

A) Locally grown, culturally relevant foods instead of imported foods;

B) Increased access to community gardens for those in need of connection to land and food;

C) Updating Peel Region's model for community gardens;

D) Reviewing the model used by food banks to service and support residents in need of their culturally specific foods.



INTRODUCTION FINDINGS (PART 3)





BRINGING DOWN THE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD IN PEEL

A) Income & Employment

B) Transportation: barriers to accessing food especially in Caledon; and unaffordable transportation in Mississauga and Brampton

C) Current policies and/or bylaws that act as barriers to growing food

D) Currently, municipal governments and local politicians raise awareness about food insecurity by promoting the use of food banks and the need for community donations.

Instead, government needs to address the conditions and environments that SHAPE food injustice and support community led initiatives, systems change solutions, and strategic efforts for food justice led by Black, Indigenous and racialized food mandated organizations.

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IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC

A) Residents are having to choose paying rent over buying food;

B) More reliance on accessing food supports – need to ensure food is provided with dignity and equity.

SUPPORT COMMUNITY GRASSROOTS FOOD JUSTICE INITIATIVES CURRENTLY BEING LED BY BLACK, INDIGENOUS AND RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES

such as:

- 1. Peelyouthfoodcircle
- 2. Shade of Miti
- 3. Sundance Harvest
- 4. Sustain Sauga
- 5. Peel Climate Justice.



INTRODUCTION PFAC BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Peel Food Action Council (PFAC) was established in 2019 and our members represent various perspectives from the food system, including producers, food businesses, consumers, health sector, environmental sector, education sector, hunger relief sector, government, and representation from the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee and United Way Greater Toronto.

OUR VISION

is for a just, sustainable and secure food system for now and the future. Our work is guided by our Strategic Plan and the Peel Food Charter, which is a living document developed by the Peel Food Security Taskforce and the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee in 2017.

OUR MISSION

is to work collaboratively with Peel Region's diverse communities to move Peel's food system towards our vision by:

- Serving as a gathering point for the community to discuss food issues;
- Amplifying the voices of Peel's communities on food issues and at relevant networks;
- **Being an advocate** regarding food issues to Peel Region's decision-making organizations and platforms including all levels of government;
- **Building relationships** between individuals, communities, businesses, organizations and government to develop a just food system in Peel Region
- Working alongside Peel's equity seeking and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour communities to support community-led initiatives for food justice
- **Remaining independent** of any one organization and acting in the above capacities in the interest of the general population.

Our Strategic Plan can be found on PFAC's website.





INTRODUCTION LIMITATIONS

With tight summer timelines to engage community in this research project, and with the limitations of COVID-19, the Consultant Team, Peer Researchers and PFAC relied on our shared relationships and networks to promote and encourage participation in community conversations. Face-to-face community conversations and meetings would have allowed us to piggy-back on existing community events, conversations, and programming, thus reaching more people to inform this work. The use of a digital engagement strategy as the primary method of data collection, unfortunately, excluded residents without access to the Internet, electronic devices or with specific disabilities. All public promotion for the community conversations was done through social media channels, rather than flyers and word of mouth at partnering organizations' locations, which also limited the audience.

Summer (August) timelines meant that many people were away on vacation and were too busy in early September to connect. And connecting with farmers during peak season was a challenge, that resulted in a limited farming lens in the report.

Despite these limitations, the community conversations were able to garner diverse perspectives, honest feedback and a rich sharing of lived experiences of Peel's food system and food realities. The Consultant Team has confidence in the data received through community conversations and that the data can be used to inform, guide and be relied on to create a plan for PFAC's next steps. The Consultant Team also stresses **the need for continuous engagement with the community in developing and implementing the recommendations suggested in this report.**

INTRODUCTION METHODOLOGY THE TEAM, AND HOW WE WORKED TOGETHER



This research project was led on the ground by a group of almost entirely BIPOC youth from Peel Region. These Peer Researchers helped to ground this work in the Peel Region. They guided the planning and project processes, co-created the research tools with the Consultant Team and helped frame the research. They hosted community conversations and analyzed what came out of those.

The project team used a participatory, anti-oppressive approach with both the peer researchers and the residents whose voices have shaped this project. Peer Researchers and the Consultant Team met weekly to plan and build an understanding of the research but more importantly to build the capacity of Peer Researchers in feeling comfortable and confident to shape and implement community conversations (examining the literature review, outreach, hosting conversations, note taking) and in data analysis. Peer Researchers strengthened the research process significantly by helping the project hone in on key definitions and making sure that the language we used was clear and resonated with residents.

Peer Researchers brought their unique lens to each conversation and took the time to understand, probe and have real conversations with residents. One of the primary outcomes of this research, over and beyond the data from community conversations, was the hope that there would be an increase in the awareness of both the food system and food justice in Peel amongst Peer Researchers. Peer Researchers not only expressed more awareness of the food system but felt more engaged in it since working on the research and also indicated that they are more aware of the areas of advocacy that are needed.



"What I enjoyed the most about my experience as a Peer Researcher was the opportunity it gave me to connect with engaged Peel residents and organizations. Through these connections I was able to animate and further develop my own understanding of the Peel food system - because I was able to directly connect with people whose work/advocacy work intersected with the Peel food system. I am leaving this experience with an improved perspective and a new language for food justice that reflects the lived experiences and reflections that the key informants [residents] shared with me."





"I had a very positive experience as a Peer Researcher for PFAC. This opportunity allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the food system in Peel. I previously had little knowledge on food banks in Peel, but **this role made me more aware of these initiatives and improvements that should be made in these areas.**"

"The best part of the experience was being able to reach out to, and directly talk with a number of key individuals from a variety of communities and understanding their experiences in food justice and advocacy in Peel. It was enjoyable listening to their answers on the agreed upon questions, but also **taking the questions in a more interesting direction** when possible and focusing on specific, relevant aspects of what they described when the opportunity became available."





"I learned a lot about food issues in Peel Region and why are these important to be addressed and also ways we can prevent food insecurity. My experience as a peer researcher was amazing. I learned a lot. I excelled my skills about researching."

INTRODUCTION



METHODOLOGY community conversations

The research project hosted **over 40 community conversations** with residents across Peel, focusing on including people from the following categories:

- 1. **BIPOC Food Advocates**
- 2. Faith Based Organizations
- 3. Individuals Experiencing Food Insecurity
- 4. Local Food Initiatives
- 5. Organizations Serving Newcomers & Immigrants
- 6. Urban Black & Indigenous Communities
- 7. Agricultural Perspective
- 8. Region of Peel Planners

Most of the categories listed above emerged from the literature review as key voices that are not heard from enough. The project reached out to these groups in an effort to fill this gap and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

We developed the list of questions for the community conversations (Appendix A), conducted the conversations and analyzed what came out of these conversations. By making groups of the central themes that emerged from different voices, we were able to weave voices together to create the Community Stories below, that share Peel residents' experiences, ideas and recommendations about our food system.

Each story embeds several themes and also shares potential solutions and activities that residents recommended might help to address the gaps and/or remove barriers. The stories are fictional and centre around characters that represent both the residents that contributed to this research project and the wider demographics of Peel Region.

It is important to note that participants spoke about several different aspects of the food system in Peel and not only to the category the research categorized them into.

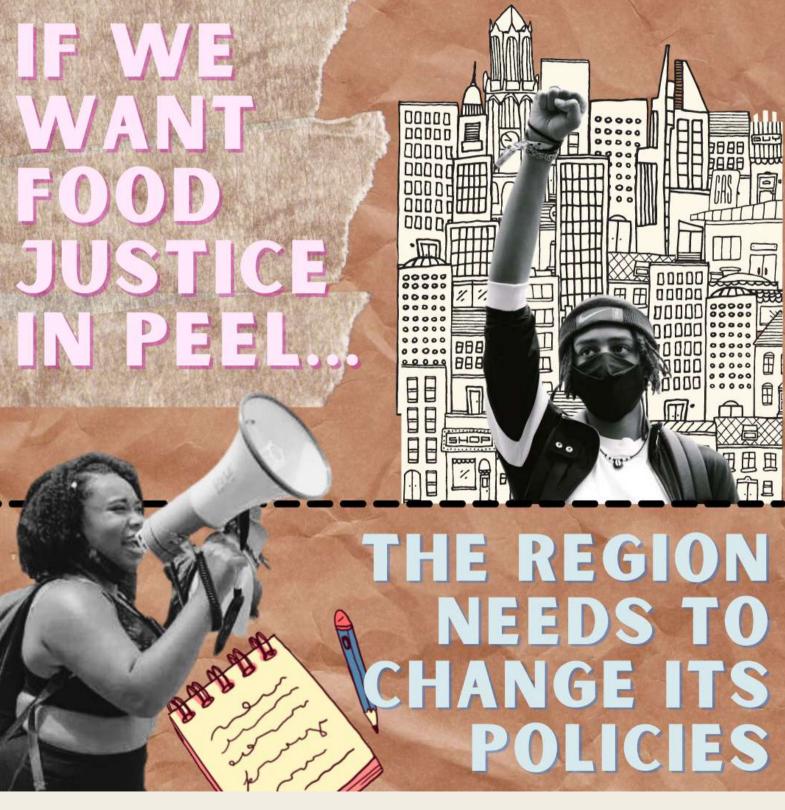
For example, even though the research categorized one (1) resident as a farmer, many residents spoke about their experiences with farming in Peel and therefore, many of the stories speak to farming and its challenges.



ACTION ITEMS HOW POLICIES NEED TO CHANGE ACCORDING TO PEEL RESIDENTS

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MANDATE DEVELOPERS TO CREATE SPACES FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS





2 INCREASE POLICIES THAT SUPPORT AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITH FOOD GROWING AREAS CONNECTED TO SITES



OUNCIL









CREATE POLICIES AGAINST LOW NUTRITIONAL FOODS BEING SOLD CHEAPLY, AND SUBSIDIZE HIGH NUTRITION FOODS

FOOD APARTHEID:

INEQUALITIES WITHIN OUR FOOD SYSTEM SUCH AS LACK OF AFFORDABLE, FRESH PRODUCE AND AN OVERABUNDANCE OF FAST FOOD CHAINS IN CERTAIN NEIGHBOURHOODS STEMMING DIRECTLY FROM SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION

> PEEL FOOD ACTION COUNCII



55 CREATE POLICIES AROUND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AND SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE WAYS OF GROWING FOOD



GOVERNMENT

SYSTEM.

NEEDS TO ADDRESS

SYSTEMIC RACISM

WITHIN THE FOOD



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ACTION ITEMS

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SUPPORT CREATIVE

SOLUTIONS LIKE

ROOFTOP

GARDENING

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE CITY

SUPPORT URBAN FARMING PROJECTS IN FOOD INSECURE NEIGHBOURHOODS

2



FUNDING TO MAKE GROWING IN URBAN SPACES ACCESSIBLE

PROVIDE FREE ACCESS TO LAND FOR BIPOC COMMUNITIES

4



A PEOPLES' DEFINITION OF FOOD JUSTICE

As shared through community conversations with Peel residents.

FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES NOT LOOK LIKE ...



FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES NOT LOOK LIKE

SYSTEMIC RACISM IN ALL OUR INSTITUTIONS & PROCESSES

"the underlying reason for food injustice in Peel is the INEQUITIES experienced by certain groups in accessing:

1. HEALTH CARE

2.LAND

3. HOUSING

- **4.EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**
- **5.EDUCATION AND**
- 6.COMMUNITY SUPPORT.

FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES NOT LOOK LIKE

FOOD SYSTEM

"... relying on emergency food programs, which is only a SHORT TERM solution..."

> "...Farmers being seen as labourers instead of land stewards or food producers."

"People should not be held back from accessing food and housing because of their identities or financial means."

> "...Having to improvise when it comes to your next meal."



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FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES NOT LOOK LIKE ...

COLONIALISM & OUR CURRENT COLONIAL GOVERNMENT & FOOD SYSTEM

"Food injustice is fundamentally related to colonialism.

IWhitel, European foods were, and continue to be, imposed on Indigenous peoples and people of colour in Peel without deeply acknowledging the traditional foods and ways of life of these peoples. In this context, **food is used to oppress individuals from marginalized groups."**

OUR GOVERNMENT creates scarcity INTENTIONALLY.

SCARCITY \rightarrow COMPETITION \rightarrow CAPITALIST PROFIT.

A PEOPLES' DEFINITION OF FOOD JUSTICE

As shared through community conversations with Peel residents.

FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL IN PEEL LOOKS LIKE ...

FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES LOOK LIKE

FREEDOM

PEOPLE OVER PROFIT:

"If people were centered, we'd be moving towards equitable access to food."

"Freedom to choose WHEN to EAT

WHAT to EAT WHAT to GROW HOW to DISTRIBUTE'

"People have a right to being healthy and not go hungry."

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FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES LOOK LIKE

POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTION

"It means a shift from food being a COMMODITY to food being a NECESSITY."

"Addressing the underlying issues of money, education, and social injustice that lead to food injustice."

"Equitable access also means education – educating residents on sustainable food practices."

"Needs to be done with dignity and love and respect."



FOOD JUSTICE IN PEEL DOES LOOK LIKE ...

EQUITABLE ACCESS

"In a truly food just world, there are no food gatekeepers."

"...everyone getting the equal share of the food irrespective of their family income"

"WE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO: Affordable Culturally relevant & Environmentally conscious FOODS."

"Everyone having equal rights to food, no barriers."



PEEL'S FOOD SYSTEM MAP

We asked Peel residents, food growers, volunteers, decision-makers and more about how our food system works - and doesn't work - here in Peel Region. Below you see three areas of this "Food System" mapped out, from how we produce our food, to how we prepare and eat it, and how different communities in Peel experience our food system differently based on race and class, etc.



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PEEL COMMUNITY FOOD STORIES

WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR & AGAINST



ANCESTRAL TEACHINGS

RACIAL EQUITY

ACCESS TO FOOD

RECONNECTING TO LAND CAPITALISM COLONIAL SYSTEMS INJUSTICE BUREAUCRACY

Things need to change. Our parks should be designed to include community gardens.

In Peel, land is seen as profitable real estate instead of farmland.

There's a lack of good paying jobs, especially for newcomers and people of colour.

Peel needs to ensure that the land and the people connected to the land, are taken care of.

The Region of Peel needs to provide a map of available growing land and how to access that land to garden and farm.







PEEL COMMUNITY FOOD STORIES

I rely on food to connect with my heritage and culture, my spirituality, ancestral teachings and lineage.

> Growing food has become very individualistic. Where I come from, people farm together.

> >

If only the rich can afford to shop at farmers markets, then something is wrong.

There's too much red tape and bylaws in Peel that dictate what we can and cannot grow.

We need to learn about the TREATIES we have that govern this land.

Our food policies are colonial and white supremacist, and need to change.

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The people who need to be at the decision-making tables in Peel are shut out.

Frontline food workers can't afford the food they sell, they work long hours, and are worried that they'll get fired if they take time off during the pandemic.



COUNCI







JEREMIAH



Jeremiah is a farmer in Peel and farming has been in his family for generations. Like urban many farmers, Jeremiah is struggling to afford all the expenses related to operating his farm -water, good soil, clean access to sunlight, hydro, a post-harvest handling facility. transport, and fencing. He wishes that there was more government support in subsidizing food.

THIS IS HIS STORY.



For Jeremiah to pay off his production costs, he would have to sell his produce at prices equivalent to those at farmers markets, which he knows is not accessible to many residents in Peel. To reasonably and ethically price his produce, people would have to recognize the real cost of producing food and unfortunately, there is not enough awareness of this just yet. Much like him, he sees many urban and community farms competing with large-scale capital markets such as huge grocery chains. Unlike him, these chains can sell food at much cheaper rates due to their ability to produce a lot more food – this leaves farmers like Jeremiah out of grocery stores as their produce is too expensive.

Because of the infrastructure we currently have, Peel residents can access foods from all over the world. Due to the use of unsustainable practices, imported foods are typically priced inexpensively. This allows Peel residents to regularly purchase food from faraway places. Canadian agriculture competes with food that can be grown less expensively in other countries. With the expensive cost of land, together with regulations around environmental standards Peel farmers need to meet and the increasing minimum wage, it makes staying competitive with other countries unfeasible. Furthermore,

IN PEEL, LAND IS SEEN AS PROFITABLE REAL ESTATE INSTEAD OF FARMLAND

and the existing farmland is seen as an opportunity to exploit land and build settlements and businesses instead of opportunities for more green spaces and opportunities to feed residents.



Jeremiah has also been working with the Region of Peel towards a stronger mandate on expanding urban farms and gardens. His approach has been to co-create incentives and programs to encourage those who are interested in small-scale farming to get involved. He feels as though there needs to be more education provided by governments around agriculture and the creation of different entry points into the food ecosystem. This would have economic benefits as Canada is in need of a new generation of farmers. He advocates for the examination of policies that encourage support towards locally grown food and policies that facilitate relationships between farmers, especially from marginalized communities, and sellers. He sees a role for city planners to design parks that allow for community gardens, where vegetable plants can be intertwined with fruit orchards and nut trees. As well, he believes that every new development that is created in Peel should have a community garden attached to it – 'the bigger the development the bigger the garden.' He sees the government as having a role to play in educating and engaging community and grassroots organizations in building relationships with the food system, cleaning up the land, and being involved in farmers' journeys.

He thinks we need to tackle the issues on two fronts:



Through policy changes and distribution of financial resources to build an infrastructure that can make it easier for farmers to grow and produce healthy food; and

Removing barriers so that consumers can afford and consume these foods.

Jeremiah has started a farmers' collaborative in which more seasoned farmers share their knowledge with younger farmers.



DAWN

community food Dawn is a advocate. They see that Black youth and their families have been pushed to the sidelines - again. Dawn is in the midst of developing a documentary to capture the of Black experience vouth engaged in the farming community and to share the history of how colonizers built the agricultural system off the backs of slaves.

THIS IS THEIR STORY.

Dawn and their friends are working with schools in hopes that they can release the documentary to high school students. Dawn also hopes that food, growing food, community infrastructure and relationships with food will be part of the curriculum in schools. They also know that land access and ownership is a privilege – with a lack of money and resources, you lack the influence needed to make change.

Although Caledon is primarily made up of farmland,

MOST OF THESE FARMS ARE RUN BY WHITE FAMILIES WHO HAVE NOT ENGAGED THE LOCAL BIPOC COMMUNITIES.

Access to wealth is necessary to have control over what/how/when you garden. Dawn has been advocating for additional training and supports for BIPOC urban farms where people can learn hands on, through culturally relevant training programs focusing on growing and harvesting, community mentorship, and spreading knowledge to other places.





METZLI

Many people have very little say in how land is used and accessing land is very difficult - you "can't simply just go plant a tree anywhere". Metzli, a voung. racialized newcomer woman from Mexico and a nutritionist, sees clients who many are not nutritionally balanced and have limited knowledge of where their food comes from.

THIS IS HER STORY.

Metzli collaborates with many different health practitioners that emphasize the need to provide healthy foods that have essential vitamins. As practitioners, they recognize the importance of offering food as a form of medicine and know that food plays a big part in overall community wellness. Food is a way to build trust and rapport with the broader community.

She sees a number of people who have significant nutritional deficiencies, which lead to several health issues including obesity, diabetes and heart disease. She feels as though

DECISION-MAKERS ARE NOT DOING ENOUGH TO REGULATE THE FOODS THAT ARE FOUND ON GROCERY STORE SHELVES AND INSTEAD, ARE DRIVEN BY PROFIT.

Healthy foods are unaffordable, leading many to have no option but to buy unhealthy foods that are also more accessible.

Metzli has been dreaming of starting a community garden, and is inspired by Huerto Tlatelolco, an edible forest in Mexico City with 45 tree varieties, a seed bank, and a large section of bio intensive gardening that is on top of a public housing tower. In her endeavour to start a community garden, she has been challenged in navigating a lot of bureaucratic red tape, making her dreams hard to actualize. There simply is not enough land to grow food on and there are thousands of people also waiting for a plot in a community garden. **She wishes the Region of Peel could provide a map of available growing land and information on how to access that land to garden and farm.**

Metzli started thinking about growing food in her backyard but was told that there are a lot of bylaws that dictate all the activities you cannot do on your own land – she felt the process of finding and **understanding the bylaws intimidating and hard to navigate**. Furthermore, her neighbour mentioned that the City has flagged many fruit trees because they do not abide by certain bylaws. Frustrated and awaiting her own plot of land, Metzli has decided to educate those who do have community gardens by creating an Instagram page and creating content focusing on urban gardening/farming, as well as nutrition and food insecurity. She does not want others to feel alienated from the food system and she brings the community together to grow food and to share their food practices.

She feels as though **growing food has become very individualistic and where she came from, people farm together** – it is a communal activity where communities must work together, engage with food and engage with the land. She is now focused on building strong communities that are committed to collaborative food practices through collective models of growing and community care. She has been raising awareness of how to get involved with garden initiatives and how garden programs, coupled with free training initiatives and access to land, can address food insecurity.



Image: "Mural Temixco". Jorge Luis Piña.

Metzli has noticed that **people associate convenience with food, which connects the dots for her on why fast food is skyrocketing in her community.** She has started critically examining where all the unhealthy food options are in Peel and has begun mapping out these 'food swamps.'

She passionately works with her City Councillor in reimagining spaces that already exist, for example, rooftop gardens. She feels as though **the City does not currently facilitate finding innovative community growing spaces. There is land that is underutilized** and she wants to support the government in looking at spaces that they already have and think about how they can be made greener.



ESEL

During the pandemic, Esel lost her as а customer service iob attendant at Pearson Airport. Esel received federal COVID had financial support. With limited savings, and uncertainty about whether she would ever go back to work, Esel was struggling with covering the costs of food and rent.

THIS IS HER STORY.



For Esel, food insecurity is becoming her new reality, and she is starting to miss meals to survive. As a result, her relationship with the food system is changing. Food used to be a source of joy for her, as it allowed her to connect with memories and experiences she associated with her mixed Haudenosaunee and Vietnamese roots.

Since affording food has become so difficult, it has impacted her overall wellness as she no longer experiences the joy she used to through her meals. Although she has been making an effort to maintain healthy eating habits, this has become increasingly difficult as the cost of food has gone up. This, coupled with her other increasing expenses has meant she has little to spend on food.

With it being difficult to buy food, she started visiting the local food bank. Unfortunately, white bread and canned soup are served over pho and spring rolls, or blue corn and bison.

THIS WHITE-CULTURE FOOD AT THE FOOD BANK WAS NOT THE SUPPORT SHE NEEDED AS HER CULTURAL AND WELLNESS NEEDS WERE NOT BEING MET.

She considered going to the local church for food but she is afraid of the stigma associated with her community members seeing her. She is worried about what her community will think about her if they see her accessing food supports – she does not want to feel uncomfortable around them.

It struck her, during the pandemic, how essential the role of food is in her life – she also has been thinking and advocating for more equitable treatment of food workers. **Many of her friends work in frontline food services and she sees and hears about the injustices they face** – they often cannot afford the foods that they sell, work long hours, and are worried that they would get let go if they took time off during the pandemic. **She feels like residents and decision-makers alike, take this crucial role in the food system and in our communities for granted.**





PARVATHI

Parvarthi Kumar comes from a family of traditional healers that successfully documented has traditional over 400 herbal remedies and medicines in Tamil Nadu, India. At a young age, she learned about how to grow herbs using cultural knowledge and their practices healing and properties to cure illnesses from her amma (mother). These recipes and stories of healing have been passed down from generation to generation from her ancestors.

THIS IS HER STORY.

Parvathi has been living in Caledon for the last seven years and misses growing herbs for healing and connecting with the land. She wishes she could grow mint, tulsi (basil), sage and methi (fenugreek) as she did back home. She often speaks to her friends who grow herbs and vegetables, and they share tips and tricks on how to grow culturally relevant foods.

She remembers in Tamil Nadu that herb gardens were places where a diverse array of people participated in a therapeutic experience, attending to health, healing, well-being, and joy. She thinks that in Peel, gardens should be the same. They should be larger to accommodate community projects in which the garden is owned by all and can provide opportunities for building a cleaner and better environment.

Currently, if she had a plot in a community garden, she would not be able to scale up production to make a profit. The premise of farmers markets in Peel is that they are local and accessible to all. However, wealthy patrons occupy these spaces because they are the ones who can afford this local food. She feels that this defeats the purpose of food access.

HAVING MORE COMMUNITY SPACES DEDICATED TO COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ACCESS TO CULTURALLY SPECIFIC FOODS AND FOOD GROWING PRACTICES IS CRUCIAL TO FOOD JUSTICE.

Since moving to Caledon, she drives a long distance to access some of her culturally appropriate foods and herbs. Access to healthy, fresh, culturally relevant, and affordable food is a challenge and will only get worse as the economic situations of many are worsening. She sees **the lack of well-paying jobs, especially for newcomers and people of colour and sees how this interacts with their purchasing power to buy healthy food for their families.** She knows **the stigmas** that are experienced by many, including the shame residents in smaller communities feel **in asking for food**.

Parvarthi has been noticing that the cost of basics such as herbs, vegetables and oils are high and often prevent many from purchasing them – their income is not keeping pace with the cost of food they need. She knows that some of her community members purchase foods that are on sale, and this is often unhealthy, processed, low nutrition foods. These foods are also produced en masse and therefore, can be sold at lower prices. These challenges are leading to more and more food insecurity amongst her neighbours.

Parvathi has started a small grassroots collective on herbs for healing to increase people's understanding and awareness of **how plants and herbs can be used to cure ailments and provide natural ways of healing the body**. She believes cultural knowledge and practices can provide access to get the care one needs, regardless of income, in a dignified and respectful way. She wants to create learning opportunities for community members to better understand how plants and herbs can be used to treat any ailments and **preserve traditional knowledge from her ancestors**.



She has noticed that **food injustice in Peel is a socio-economic issue** as certain people and neighbourhoods simply do not have access to locally grown herbs and foods. She wishes that she could help decision-makers understand that **community gardens enable people to grow**, produce and share food and stories in a way that is culturally specific. In her experience, **food systems in Peel are colonial** and one of charity – **this embeds a sense of hierarchy** in the process. She wants to shift people's paradigm to more cultural concepts of care in caring for the land and using herbs and food for healing. When herbs were used for healing those in pain or sick back home, she remembers that it was not an act of charity but rather that you are serving with equality and dignity – people did not see it as a handout.

She is a huge advocate for clients to be given food that is culturally relevant - food that sustains and nourishes and food that brings them joy and allows them to connect with their culture.



ALYX

Purchasing land in Peel is very expensive local small businesses many and organizations cannot afford to make the investment of buying land to farm. There is much greed and, generally, so an environment in which capitalism is upheld as a structure. Far too many people focus on business and growth and not enough people are interested in ensuring the land and people connected to the land are taken care of. Alyx is a settler in Canada and strives to be an ally working with Indigenous peoples in Canada. They raise awareness of what it means to own land on stolen land.

THIS IS THEIR STORY.

Many community stakeholders such as residents, government, and community organizations need to come together for successful growing to take place. The community plays a huge role. Community engagement leads to a deeper community consciousness towards food. As a settler in so-called Canada, Alyx has started advocating for **#LANDBACK** to raise awareness of what it means to own land that was stolen through colonization. They have been working with Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous food justice leaders to advocate for food sovereignty and reclaiming the right to healthy and culturally grown foods in their communities.

In these community discussions, Alyx is learning

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACKNOWLEDGING AND CONSIDERING THE MEANINGS OF THE TREATIES WE HAVE THAT GOVERN THE LAND AND UNDERSTANDING WAYS TO PROPERLY RESPECT AND BE RESPONSIBLE WITH THE LAND.

They are also learning how Indigenous food systems and ways of life continue to be threatened by climate change, degradation of plant and animal habitats, widespread environmental contamination, threats from oil pipelines, wildfires, and failed government policies, including **colonial "food security" policies**.

PEEL FOOD ACTION COUNCIL Alyx listens to local community leaders speak about the history African and Indigenous communities have with food, growing food, nature, horticultural therapy, as well as about **our food system's link to slavery, historically and today with migrant labour**. They are actively learning more from Black and Indigenous communities, and supporting critical advocacy and understanding on **how our current agricultural system has been designed by colonial practices.** Alyx has created an Instagram account to platform community stories and advocate for change from municipal, provincial and federal leaders.



In launching their Instagram account, Alyx started their advocacy on **housing: a core issue for many Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, and disabled communities**. The cost of housing is very expensive; transportation is pricey and living expenses are on the rise. **The people who need to be at decision-making tables are shut out and decisions for them are being made without their thoughts and experiences embedded into the context and solutions.** Alyx believes that **the Region of Peel should encourage and support BIPOC residents in opening food stores in strategic locations** for ease of access to their communities. Many social services are designed around Western food needs and are Eurocentric. Alyx feels that the gaps in current food initiatives boils down to the fact that we still only think about food issues with a white, European cultural lens.

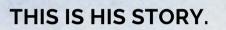
Access to food banks can be limited and from their experience, the food at food banks is not considered healthy and fresh produce is often close to being spoiled. The food bank Alyx accesses is not built with a diverse community in mind and they feel as though they should accept anything that is given to them. They feel like people at food banks have to shed their cultural practices to survive – Alyx wishes that food banks could center their services based on the cultures they are serving.

Unfortunately, food justice programming uses a one-size-fits-all model but the reality is that food injustice is experienced differently by different communities. Producing more food does not necessarily increase access. It may increase availability, but the reality is that food costs money and healthier food does cost more.



TONY

Food is not only for consumption and sustenance for Tony as he relies on food to connect with his African heritage and culture, his spirituality, his ancestral teachings and to his lineage. Certain dishes hold knowledge and wisdom – they serve a purpose beyond just consumption. He sees that there is considerable emphasis placed on buying ethnic food from overseas within his community.





Tony wishes that more of his ethnic food was grown locally. He and some of his friends are part of the **Toronto Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective** and are building an advocacy campaign about food insecurity issues impacting Black community members, specifically in Peel Region. To help raise awareness of the different types of social issues facing Black community members, Tony wants to educate people about the need to increase access to local, healthy, and fresh foods for Black communities in need of nutrition; those experiencing health issues and people on fixed incomes needing affordable food. He feels as though

PEEL NEEDS TO PRIORITIZE THE LIVED REALITIES AND EXPERIENCES OF ITS BLACK COMMUNITIES

facing food insecurity issues and support sustainable community development by improving community led initiatives and supporting local farmers/growers and products. Residents in Peel should get used to eating foods that are local because it is healthier and sustainable. People need to be educated – **people should be asking questions about where their food is coming from and how it is impacting the environment**.

They need to develop a relationship to the food they consume and the land it comes from. Tony sees the relationship between financial security and food insecurity and advocates for programs and approaches that address the root issues impacting Black communities. He often says, 'Good food is actually available in abundance but unfortunately, it is not accessed equitably and much of it gets wasted, too.' In his advocacy, he has started applying a decolonial lens and introduces a new language – a language that recognizes the many roles food plays in our lives and survival.

FROM STORIES TO SYSTEMS-CHANGE

STORIES CAN SHAPE, AND <u>RE-SHAPE</u> SOCIETY.

Our research, combined with these stories from the lived experience of residents across Peel point towards the **underlying issues that lead to food injustices in Peel**, as well as to potential **avenues for lasting, systemic change...**

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FOOD ACTION IN PEEL

This research work and the Peel Food Action Council provide the following recommendations and **call on the Region of Peel** and all food justice collectives to strive towards these and other intersecting goals for food justice in Peel.

ADVOCACY

- Build an awareness of and critically examine local food growing policies and bylaws. Advocate to change those that create barriers to food justice initiatives.
- Review the policies/advocate for policies that build an infrastructure to ease food growth and production of healthy foods.

SERVICES

- Reimagine how social services such as food banks are designed and led, naming and focusing on transforming racist, capitalist practices that harm service users.
- Examine how these services can shift their organizational models currently based on charity to models of mutual aid, solidarity, equality and dignity.
- Examine the impacts of the pandemic, specifically on residents' reliance on food banks.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOOD ACTION IN PEEL

LAND ACTION

- Raise (government and popular) awareness of what it means to own land on illegally occupied Treaty land.
- Work with required levels of government to reimagine green spaces that already exist.
- Develop opportunities to invite people into the food system, grow food together and share in their food practices.
- Develop a map of Peel that illustrates where available growing land is located and where the 'food swamps' are across the Region. Act on this map to eliminate 'food swamps'.

CONNECTION & DIALOGUE

- Develop opportunities for seasoned farmers to share their knowledge with less experienced farmers and support a peer-to-peer model of support.
- Actively engage in critical discussion and understand multiple narratives connected to food and farming from Indigenous, Black and racialized lenses.

EDUCATION & OTHER GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Provide residents with information on how to access land to garden and farm on help them navigate this complex system.
- Build an awareness of how to get involved with Peel Region (urban/rural) garden initiatives
- Spread the idea that food should be nutritious, not just 'convenient'.
- Build awareness campaigns that educate residents on Indigenous practices of stewarding and respecting the land.
- Develop educational campaigns that share information and knowledge of cultural practices, including healing with food and herbs.





CONCLUSION



Food justice is a topic that is complicated and requires a deep understanding of historical and present-day systems that have shaped this land we call Peel.

To talk about and advocate for food justice, we need to disrupt our understanding of an agricultural system designed by colonizers and built on stolen land with the labour of enslaved African people, racialized migrant workers and many more unjust systems.

Our current food systems were never designed for Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities to survive and thrive. Today's food justice issues here in Peel Region are the result of other complex issues such as unemployment, poverty, housing, the pandemic, etc.

Grassroots community organizers are leading the efforts in critically examining policies, practices and approaches that require us to question current systems and imagine new ways of living and thriving, connecting with ancestral and cultural knowledges, and building infrastructures of community care. In this research project, we heard many stories from residents, that clearly showcased that

WE SIMPLY CANNOT WAIT FOR THESE ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED BY OUR GOVERNING LEADERS, AND NEED TO TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION NOW.

THE TIME IS NOW TO ADVANCE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS TO FOOD.

This requires conversations, partnerships and infrastructure that can sustain **a new system**. Through these stories, there are several action areas that have been identified that can be championed by PFAC and its partners, and others that require more research, conversations with local municipal partners and continuous engagement with the residents that are farming, those who are producing, distributing, serving and consuming food in Peel Region.







QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

1. What does your role/participation in the food system look like? What parts of the food system are you engaged with? [refer to diagram above]

PROBE: Are there any parts missing for you in this food system chart?

PROBE: (only if they have indicated being a part of food initiatives in Peel): Do you participate in food advocacy initiatives in Peel? Does this initiative need volunteers, if so, what skills, and how many volunteers do you need?

2. How do communities in Peel connect and interact with the part of the food system [refer to diagram above] that you're primarily involved with?

PROBE: If someone speaks about being part of a the 'joy/leisure' part of the food system and the 'spiritual/cultural medicine' part, probe for how EACH of these communities they are part of connect and interact with the food system.

3. What does food justice mean to you? From your perspective, what are the underlying reasons for food injustice in Peel? [share definition above]

PROBE: Is there anything missing from this definition below that you would like to add?

4. What are the barriers to food justice in Peel Region? (Note: share examples that connect with KI you are speaking to such as transit, not enough land to grow, affordability etc.)

5. We know that access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food is an issue in Peel. What other factors can make it hard for you or your community to get the food you/they need? (i.e., ethnicity, underemployment, how communities are designed etc.) access?

6. What does access to food mean to you? What gaps/barriers in the food system need to be addressed and how?

7. What are your specific needs and realities related to your role within the context of the Peel food system? What are some possible solutions and/or ideas to the issues and challenges you have shared?

8. With the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic, how has your role/participation within the food system been impacted/changed?

9. Why is it hard for you/networks/communities you are connected to, to get access to space to grow food in Peel?

10. What is preventing Peel's community gardens and urban farms from feeding more families? What are any other issues with community gardens in Peel? [Note: questions are specific to the individuals you are speaking to]

11. What can the government do to make growing food accessible in urban spaces for everyone? (in terms of changes to policies, laws, funding or other barriers or supports)

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

13. Is there anyone else you think we should speak to about this topic? Are there any other questions that you think we should be asking?



FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY VOICES A REPORT & COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

BY



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