

What's on your plate?

By Kreesta Doucette, Manitoba Food Charter Coordinator

Next time you're about to sit down to a council breakfast meeting, try this experiment. Ask yourself, *Where did this food come from? How much did it cost me? How much money went to the person who grew the ingredients? How much time went into processing, packaging and preparing it? Why did I choose to eat this particular food?* The answer to the last question might be because it just isn't cool to order the fruit plate when everyone is having over-easy and sausages. However, the previous questions might reveal some interesting facts. Food is something that all of us deal with every day. Many Manitobans make their livelihoods from it. Whether we grow it, buy it, cook it, or just eat it, there's more to food than just the taste.

We hear often in the news about food and our health, the increase in obesity and the risk of diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. In addition to the negative impacts on our communities and our health, these diseases are also expensive. Did you know that over 40% of the provincial budget goes towards health care? We are also facing declining farm populations and incomes, expensive food in northern communities, a loss in food skills such as cooking and preserving, and hunger. Over 40,000 Manitobans use food banks each month. Granted, the food system is a complex issue, but we can start somewhere.

As municipalities your work connects to food in many areas including economic development, food sector jobs, roads and transportation, waste management, health, and what kind of foods kids are getting at the local school.

Some ideas other municipalities have tried include doing research on purchasing policies and access to healthy food in municipal facilities. Finding out how the food sector impacts your local economy is a good start. Do you have healthy options at your office meetings, community centers and schools? You could support local residents by buying and eating locally produced foods. A switch to fair trade coffee means farmers in other parts of the world can get a better price. Are there businesses and partners in the community you can work with?

Does your community offer waste diversion and reduction programs such as recycling and household and agricultural com-

posting? How about getting your school and seniors home to share cooking skills.

Take a look at the impact of municipal policies on the food system and consider food policy when planning zoning, transportation and land use planning. Do you support your local farmers markets? Are there spaces for community gardens? Your municipal greening plan could include edible fruit trees and berry patches.

Are there hungry people in your community? If so can you work towards economic, employment, and transportation policies and programs for dignified food access? Are there nutrition programs available?

If you have food programs that are already working well, please let us know about them. We are launching the 2007 Golden Carrot Awards and someone from your community could be a winner.

The Manitoba Food Charter Organization is available to work with your municipality on developing an action plan to work towards a just and sustainable food system. If you have questions or comments, please contact us at 1-800-731-2638 or info@mbfoodcharter.ca. You can also visit our website: <http://www.manitobafoodsecurity.ca>.

And hey - next time you're at a breakfast meeting, order the fruit plate. Maybe a few other councillors will order it too. ☺



The author presented "Putting Municipalities on the Menu" at the 2007 M.O.S. in February. That presentation is available on the AMM website at <http://www.amm.mb.ca/PDF/Events/MOS/2007%20Presentations/FoodCharter.pdf>

AIKINS
Municipal Law

**Recognized expertise across Manitoba -
working with you to be a trusted legal advisor on
the unique challenges of municipal government.**

*Michael J. Mercury, Q.C. Colin R. MacArthur, Q.C.
Charles L. Chappell Robert L. Tyler
Aaron J. Bowler*

*Aikins is Manitoba's oldest (founded in 1879) and largest law firm and provides
a full range of legal services to local, regional, national and international clients.*

30th Floor Commodity Exchange Tower
360 Main Street Winnipeg, MB
204.957.0050 www.aikins.com

AIKINS, MACAULAY & THORVALDSON LLP