

The Daily Gleaner

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By Peter Corbyn

Sustainable Food for Thought

Thousands of children around Fredericton will go out trick or treating tonight and bring home thousands of pounds of candy and chips that are processed all around North America. Not that I am complaining about helping our daughter consume a few bags of Cheetos and Twizzlers, however! But on this note, I'm presenting some sustainable 'food for thought' today as we hand out all that candy tonight.

The Fredericton Food Bank has been serving Fredericton area residents from their 860 Grandame Street location since 1984. The Food Bank has typically assisted up to 700 families each month, but in the last few years that number has jumped to more than 900 families, thus exceeding the capacity of their current location. This is a worrisome trend, but is the current reality in our city. And due to this excess capacity, and for a number of other proactive reasons, the Food Bank recently purchased the former Green Village Garden Center and property at the north side of the Princess Margaret Bridge. They plan to move into the new location in February 2012.

Their long-term vision extends far beyond using the Green Village location as a place that can manage their growing capacity requirements in terms of food storage, handling and distribution. The Fredericton Food Bank is thinking long term and focusing on community outreach far beyond the needs of those 900 families.

Imagine a place with one of the largest community gardens in Atlantic Canada, maybe Canada. Imagine a place where students can come and learn about local, organic food production and healthy living and eating. Imagine a place where people learn life and business skills, and where a teaching kitchen helps people from all walks of life learn how to eat healthier and more sustainably.

What I most love about the Food Bank's vision is their planned journey towards expanding their value and offerings, not only to Frederictonians in need, but to all of us in the community who could benefit from learning more about the value (socially, economically and environmentally) of local food production and preparation.

We all have busy lives and sometimes our meals reflect that lifestyle (i.e. quick meals and not always healthy). Perhaps there are meals we can learn to prepare and methods we can use that will keep us healthier, including purchasing more locally grown organic food grown by individuals or by small co-op businesses.

Community gardens are a growing phenomenon all around the world, and especially in large urban centres such as Toronto and Detroit. Basically, they are a place where people can come

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together to grow their own food and plants in a socially supportive and co-operative place. The gardens provide an opportunity to pool resources and experiences, but more importantly, an opportunity to grow your own local food, or help some people start their own business by selling their produce at the market or directly to local restaurants or families.

In a perfect world, organizations like the Food Bank would not have to exist, but sadly, they do. As global and local citizens, not only do we have to help our neighbours around the world in times of need (Haiti, Turkey, and Japan, just recently), but we have a moral obligation to help our neighbours in our own community. The Life Skills Education Centre will provide assistance for clients on various employment, literacy and life-skills matters, including, running a small garden business.

Perhaps this could seed the growth of many more acres of locally grown and consumed foods over the next decade, as well as create sustainable employment opportunities at the same time. Dare to dream.

The Fredericton Food Bank is looking for volunteers to help attain these goals, please contact Elizabeth Crawford Thurber at foodbank@nb.aibn.com or check out their website at www.frederictonfoodbank.com to find out how you can help this vision become a reality.

Peter Corbyn is Special Advisor to The Climate Project Canada and co-founder of GreenNexus.com.