



# Message from the Chair

July 8, 2011

Sometimes we have to lift our heads from the work at hand, step back and look at the food we produce and where it ends up. Jessica Leeder did that in an article she wrote for the *Globe and Mail* titled "A cure for the common hospital meal". Jessica's article talks about the connection between health and good food in hospitals. If you have been a hospital patient lately, you will know what she is talking about.

Each hospital meal costs less than three dollars per person. About 40 per cent of what is served comes back and is thrown in the waste bin. Many kitchens in hospitals are not actually cooking kitchens but rather "retherm" or reheating kitchens only. Products are delivered pre-packaged and frozen and are heated and served to patients. While in some cases, a 30 per cent reduction in labour is promised with the entrees being prepared off-site, these cost savings come at a price to the patients and their recovery.

Thanks to an initiative of the provincial government, the Broader Public Sector Investment Fund was formed to promote the increased use of Ontario food procured by municipal, university, school, and hospital food services. Scarborough Hospital and St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph are two institutions that have received funding to promote the use of fresh Ontario foods in their facilities. Local Food Plus is playing a role in assisting these institutions to source locally-produced foods.

Leslie Carson, Manager of Food and Nutrition at Guelph's St. Joseph's Health Centre has a daily budget of only \$7.33 to provide patients with three meals and two snacks. St. Joseph's is now developing its own salads and hot dishes made with Ontario foods – and its food service satisfaction rate has risen to 87 per cent. Leslie is also sharing her experiences with other hospitals and long-term care facilities. Many are skeptical as they perceive local food to be more expensive. Leslie is hoping to prove them wrong. What no one can argue with is the satisfaction rate that many hospitals cannot replicate given their current food service systems.

Leslie has been nominated a "champion" by the Broader Public Sector Investment Fund for her work promoting local foods in public institutions. She has made St. Joseph's an example of how health care patients – and the health care sector itself – can benefit from "going local". The opportunities for farmers, processors and distributors are vast in a sector that serves over 115 million meals to patients and residents each year.

Making the connection between food and better health may seem obvious but as obesity, rates of diabetes and other chronic diseases rise, maybe a more direct link needs to be highlighted. Education is key, and perhaps it is time for a food literacy program for schools and community groups. Champions like Leslie and chef Joshna Maharaj at Scarborough Hospital will help to make change happen at the institutional level. Farmers and associations such as Local Food Plus, the Holland Marsh Growers' Association and Algoma Orchards will ensure a steady supply of fresh, healthy, safe Ontario food products. Distribution must be available through the large and small suppliers. The whole value chain must be engaged for Ontario food to be part of a healthy diet.

Next time you visit a hospital, do more than visit. Take a look at the food and ask some hard questions about whether the food provided is part of the treatment or part of the problem!

Respectfully,  
Nick Ferri, Chair, GTAAAC

*News from the GTAAAC will be published bi-monthly. The information contained within may be reproduced by anyone receiving it. If you are reading a forwarded copy and wish to receive your own copy please send an email with "Subscribe" in the subject line to Nick Ferri at [bigapple@orchard-studio.com](mailto:bigapple@orchard-studio.com).*

**Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC)**

**Janet M. Horner, Coordinator**

**Email : [janet@whitfieldfarms.com](mailto:janet@whitfieldfarms.com)**

**Phone: 519-925-5975**

**Website: [www.gtaaac.ca](http://www.gtaaac.ca)**

**Twitter: @GTA \_ AAC**

