

NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES



FOREWORD

I arrived in Toronto at the beginning of March 2013 with an Internship Visa allowing me to work for Fresh City Farms in Toronto, Canada. Over the next six months I became immersed in Toronto's urban agricultural scene through my work as an Assistant Production Manager for Fresh City Farms under my supervisor Phillip Collins, and became extensively involved at Black Creek Community Farm, where I based the majority of my research. The different partners (Everdale, Fresh City Farms, Afri-can FoodBasket and FoodShare) that exist at Black Creek Community Farm are aware of the issues that this new project is facing regarding community engagement and how access to healthy food is needed in this deprived area of the city. As a foreign Agroecology Master's student, my research was of interest to them as it provided an external, neutral, and structured analysis of the project. This research focuses on varying possible steps to moving forward for the partners on how to better include and serve the community in the future, based on the qualitative data I gathered throughout my journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I would further like to thank all of the people who showed interest in this research and gave me a bit of their time in order to answer my questions.

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Finally I would like to express a special thank you to my family and Ada Guna, for their trust and support throughout my Canadian journey.

Thank you all.

ABSTRACT

This research paper is a systemic analysis of the Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF), a new large-scale urban agriculture project that takes place in a deprived area of Toronto, Canada. The Black Creek area faces poverty and is identified as one of the food deserts that exist in North America. The different partners involved in BCCF are aware of the important role the community has to play in order for the project to succeed and in order for it to improve access to healthy and quality food in the area. Within this preliminary context, Peter Checkland's Soft System Methodology has been used to examine the situation in detail and assess its capacity to act as a social development tool. A combination of structured and spontaneous interviews as well as the technique of visioning allowed for the identification of what the community desires for future projected situations. This report suggests a number of possible next steps to be implemented, founded on the ideas collected, in order for the community to obtain ownership of the project and develop access to healthy quality food in the neighbourhood. Both BCCF and the research project faced some challenges that are discussed and situated within a wider context in order to better assess any opportunity of replicating similar actions in other cities.

Key words: *Urban agriculture; social development; healthy food access; community engagement; community farm.*

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude représente une analyse systémique de Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF), un nouveau projet d'agriculture urbaine à grande échelle implanté dans un quartier défavorisé de la ville de Toronto au Canada. Black Creek est en effet un quartier pauvre, identifié comme un des nombreux déserts alimentaires qui existent en Amérique du Nord. Les différents partenaires impliqués dans BCCF sont conscients de l'importance de la place qui doit être donnée aux résidents afin de conduire ce projet de quartier dans les meilleures conditions et d'améliorer l'accès à une nourriture saine et de qualité pour la communauté. C'est dans ce contexte que la méthodologie de Peter Checkland (Soft System Methodology) a été utilisée pour examiner en détails la situation et valider le projet comme acteur de développement social. La conduite d'interviews structurées et spontanées et la mise en place d'un atelier de prospective avec les membres de la communauté ont permis d'identifier les désirs de la population locale pour les futures saisons de la ferme. Ce rapport propose un certain nombre d'étapes à suivre, fondées sur les idées ainsi récoltées, afin que la communauté s'approprie le projet et que se développe l'accès à une nourriture saine et de qualité dans le quartier. Les difficultés rencontrées dans le cadre de cette démarche sont également étudiées, dans un souci de modélisation pour des actions comparables futures.

Mots clés: *Agriculture urbaine ; développement social ; accès à une nourriture saine ; engagement communautaire ; ferme communautaire.*

TABLE OF CONTENT

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1 - Materials and Methods | 3 |
| 1.1. The Scope of the Research | 3 |
| 1.1.1. <i>Community Outreach</i> | <i>3</i> |
| 1.1.2. <i>Access to Food for the Community</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 1.2. Soft System Methodology | 5 |
| 1.3. Tools | 7 |
| 1.3.1. <i>Interviews</i> | <i>7</i> |
| 1.3.2. <i>Rich picturing</i> | <i>9</i> |
| 1.3.3. <i>The Visioning workshop.....</i> | <i>9</i> |
| CHAPTER 2 - Results..... | 10 |
| 2.1. The Context of the Project | 10 |
| 2.1.1. <i>Black Creek Community</i> | <i>10</i> |
| 2.1.2. <i>The Farm History.....</i> | <i>12</i> |
| 2.2. The Case Study: Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF) | 14 |
| 2.2.1. <i>The Partners</i> | <i>15</i> |
| 2.2.2. <i>Diagram of the BCCF System.....</i> | <i>18</i> |
| 2.2.3. <i>The 2013 Season and Opening of the Farm</i> | <i>19</i> |
| 2.3. Rich Picture | 22 |
| 2.4. The Visions | 24 |
| 2.4.1. <i>The 2012 Partners' Vision</i> | <i>24</i> |
| 2.4.2. <i>The 2013 Community Vision.....</i> | <i>25</i> |
| 2.4.3. <i>Comparison of the Visions</i> | <i>27</i> |
| CHAPTER 3 - Necessary Steps to Moving Forward | 28 |
| 3.1. Community Engagement..... | 29 |
| 3.1.1. <i>Creation of a Community Board.....</i> | <i>29</i> |
| 3.1.2. <i>Offer Access to the Land.....</i> | <i>29</i> |
| 3.1.3. <i>Food Celebration</i> | <i>31</i> |
| 3.1.4. <i>Education and Inter-Generational Exchange.....</i> | <i>32</i> |
| 3.1.5. <i>Bringing Community Arts and Culture onto the Farm</i> | <i>34</i> |
| 3.1.6. <i>Best Means to Reach the Community</i> | <i>35</i> |

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 3.2. | Access to Affordable, Healthy Food..... | 36 |
| 3.2.1. | <i>Improve the Harvest Share Program.....</i> | <i>36</i> |
| 3.2.2. | <i>Build a Market</i> | <i>37</i> |
| 3.2.3. | <i>Develop a Farm Shop On-site</i> | <i>38</i> |
| 3.2.4. | <i>Culturally Appropriate Food.....</i> | <i>39</i> |
| 3.2.5. | <i>Supporting the Local Economy.....</i> | <i>40</i> |
| CHAPTER 4 - | Discussion | 41 |
| 4.1. | Urban agriculture as a community development tool..... | 41 |
| 4.2. | Avoiding the “Business Trap” | 42 |
| 4.3. | Redefining Community Engagement..... | 43 |
| 4.4. | BCCF Relationships | 45 |
| 4.5. | Challenges of the Participatory Approach | 47 |
| 4.6. | Is it possible in European Cities? | 48 |
| 4.7. | Another Social Dimension to Urban Agriculture | 49 |
| CONCLUSION | | 50 |
| REFERENCES..... | | 52 |
| APPENDIX..... | | 54 |

TABLE OF FIGURES

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1: Checkland's Soft System Methodology diagram..... | 6 |
| Figure 2: Incidence of low-income in the city of Toronto (City of Toronto 2010)..... | 11 |
| Figure 3: The farm site (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority 2012)..... | 13 |
| Figure 4: BCCF system diagram..... | 18 |
| Figure 5: Rich Picture of the current situation..... | 22 |
| Figure 6: Welcoming garden at BCCF..... | 30 |
| Figure 7: Callaloo..... | 39 |
| Figure 8: Okra..... | 39 |

ABBREVIATIONS

AFB: Afri-can FoodBasket

BCCF: Black Creek Community farm

FCF: Fresh City Farms

SSM: Soft System Methodology

TRCA: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

INTRODUCTION

The development of urban agriculture in highly industrialized countries also comes with more recent food system issues, one of which has been the creation of food deserts where people do not have access to healthy, nutritious food at affordable prices. Ironically, most often this low quality access in low-income areas is coupled with more expensive prices at retail stores. Having a tasty salad made of fresh local produce for lunch during summertime therefore becomes a nutritional privilege not easily accessible for those in poor communities.

From backyard gardeners to commercial growers, a wide range of academic material has shown the benefits of city farming in developed countries—as a tool for building communities, developing access to fresh food, and educating and improving the health of city dwellers (Bellows et al. 2004; Duchemin et al. 2008; Nasr et al. 2010; Nettle 2010). However, their focus is mostly on community or allotment gardens and no specific attention is paid to larger sized projects such as the Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF). Unlike these community gardens, this unique project utilizes six acres of fertile land where four organizations are engaged to run an efficient and prolific community farm in the middle of a low-income area of Toronto, Canada. The stigmatized Black Creek neighbourhood is identified as one of the existing food deserts in North America. BCCF is a new project that has been created through the coalition of three charity organizations: Everdale, Afri-can FoodBasket and FoodShare; as well as Fresh City Farms, a local food business. Their mission is “to be an urban farm that engages, educates and empowers diverse communities through the growing and sharing of food”. BCCF aims to provide the community with fresh healthy food through the engagement of the members in the project and by developing a market in the area to sell the farm’s produce.

The current project is very different from a project that was set on the same land in years previous, which put an emphasis on the community through training its youths, but forgot to utilize or redistribute the food efficiently among the community (“some vegetables were rotting in the field, nobody was harvesting them” according to a community resident).

Situated within this context, the research questions explored in this thesis are thus:

- How can large-scale urban farming projects improve access to healthy food in low-income communities and contribute to more resilient local food systems?

- How can one involve low-income communities in urban agriculture and raise awareness about food issues?

I will explore the particular situation of BCCF in this paper; in order to develop a case study to better understand the roles urban farming does and might play in the overall development of this marginalized community in Toronto. These roles are conceived as two separate parts that are interrelated. The first is an aim in understanding the whole system and identifying means to raise awareness in the neighbourhood in order to engage residents in the project. The second role investigated focuses on the potential of the farm to improve access to healthy food in the community.

In order to answer these questions, I used Peter's Checkland Soft System Methodology (SSM) in conjunction with structured and spontaneous interviews and the technique of visioning. By applying SSM and facilitating a participatory approach, the stakeholders involved in the system are seen as co-researchers.

The data gathered is then synthesized and presented as results. Next, a panel of potential steps to implement at BCCF, based on the results and on personal reflective observation, is proposed in order to move forward and make the community's desires a reality.

Attempting to build community and develop access to food in a low-income neighbourhood while also maximizing revenues for the farm is not an easy agenda and presents significant challenges that will be considered, as each objective alone requires a lot of energy and creativity. I will also reflect on the challenges of conducting a participatory research as well as the eventual reproduction of such a community farm model in Europe.

CHAPTER 1 - Materials and Methods

1.1.The Scope of the Research

Agroecology is an emerging discipline that seeks to find an alternative to the conventional, reductionist research methodologies traditionally associated with scientific inquiry.

Looking beyond Gliessman's (an internationally recognized leader in the field of Agroecology) definition of Agroecology as "the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agroecosystems" (Gliessman, 1998), it can also be seen as a science that embraces food systems in a wholesome manner (Francis, 2003). As an agroecologist, I must necessarily keep a holistic approach to grasp the situation, exploring connections between the different actors involved as a whole.

Black Creek Community Farm could therefore be seen as a key component to improving the whole of the local food system in Black Creek, all the while interacting with other elements of the system. In order to analyse the interaction between BCCF and the local food system objectively without bias, it was very important for me to be external and neutral to the project. Indeed, even though I was often present at the farm, attending to general meetings and giving a hand when it was needed, I did not have a working contract with Everdale, BCCF's front running organization. This kept me out of any internal or political issues that could have interfered with the neutrality of my research.

In line with Agroecology, where a system can be perceived in as many ways as there are people to perceive it, describing and analysing my own, somewhat novice, understanding of the project through the expression of stakeholders' perception will be of value to the BCCF partners.

1.1.1. Community Outreach

It is impossible to have access to healthy food in the community without getting the people involved and understanding how to meet their needs and expectations. It is therefore vital to get a sense of what the community desires for the Black Creek Community Farm project. People from the community must be able to identify themselves with and as part of the project.

That is why the first objective of this research is to understand the situation of BCCF and see how the community fits into this multi-partners project by elaborating on and attempting to answer the following questions:

- *What do people want the farm to look like and be used for?*
- *What would they like to see happening in the future?*
- *What kind of involvement would they have in the project?*
- *How could the community get involved and take ownership of the project?*

It will be challenging to remove any apprehension that the Black Creek community may have about the project as a result of the previous farming project being dropped. This definitely made the community more apprehensive of this new project. The first challenge then is to raise community awareness and spread the word about what is going on: opportunities for volunteering, internships, employment opportunities, or simply as a safe space to hang out. So for example, reaching out to the community by inviting them to the farm and making sure that they have a good time and want to come back.

This year is the project's first year, and there is much work to be done. One thing that is for certain is that if you do not communicate to people what is happening around their neighbourhood, then they will not be curious as to know. This has been a valuable marketing strategy, specifically adopted for this situation. In order to succeed, there should be no monetary or language barriers and the farm should be open to everyone.

The Grand Opening Farm Festival event as well as the free weekly workshops was the two main integrative activities on the agenda for this year, with a hope of gathering as many people as possible within the community, together with those who exist outside of it.

1.1.2. Access to Food for the Community

On the one hand, the food grown at BCCF has to be sold, as the farm's coordinating organization, Everdale, is a non-profit organization whose finances rely on grants funded by different foundations (e.g. Trillium, Metcalf) and private donations. As a result of the short growing period in Toronto and the need for farmers to make a living, it is difficult and unwise to place prices too low and risk going bankrupt. It is imperative that the farm sustains itself financially, which is a new challenge for Everdale, having previously relied on grants, subsidies, and charity donations.

On the other hand, from the community members' perspective, the price of the food should not be too high. BCCF and its founding partners should be aware of the fact that the average income level in the neighbourhood is, according to the City of Toronto (2010), really low, with the median household income ranging between \$31,000 and \$40,000 a year. The share of the household income spent on food has also dropped within the last few decades.

Improving food access for the community will only occur if there is success in the previously mentioned objective of community outreach. Breaking down the barriers between community and farm will also entail building confidence that products previously seen as inaccessible or unaffordable at first glance will become accessible (Baker 2003). Lauren Baker, who is currently working with the Toronto Food Council with a focus on building local food economies, observed that "the market's product mix should reflect the cultural diversity of the community" (Baker 2003). This is a great model for an urban farm, where the community is growing its own food. Most importantly, answers to the following questions should come from community members:

- *How and where would the community like the food grown at BCCF to be sold?*
- *What is the best model to provide them with healthy food at an affordable price?*

This objective, of improving food access for the community, is undoubtedly the most challenging one, as the whole project relies on its accomplishment.

1.2. Soft System Methodology

A community farm can be defined as a mix between a community garden and a commercial farm. A community garden embraces a bottom-up approach, involving community residents in its decision-making processes and in the establishment as well as the maintenance of the project (Koc et al. 1999). A commercial farm is a larger-sized organization with a business model with viable operations (Brown and Carter 2003). It must produce a sufficient income to cover the investment in human capital as well as material resources.

In the case of BCCF, and according to its partners, it is a place where food is grown by community members for community members. It therefore needs a participatory approach in order to include the community in its system successfully on a long-term basis.

As a trainee agroecologist, the main framework guiding my work is Peter Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland and Poulter 2006) – a helpful action-oriented approach which invites researchers to consider a given situation as a system, formed of various parts that interact constantly. In the Black Creek community, it has been used to grasp the context and find solutions to the questions stated above in order to better create change. This methodology has many values, driving me to embrace the complexity of the situation carefully including all perspectives and acknowledging that there can be as many understandings of a given situation as the people who participate in it.

A multi-stakeholder project results in a complex situation and this systemic approach is suitable for analyzing qualitative and subjective data as well as interpreting people's mindsets and preferences so as to consider eventual actions.

Soft System Methodology (SSM) has been applied to analyze this unstructured, complex situation – where a rural charity came to run a community farm project in a deprived neighborhood of the city. It is comprised of seven steps as detailed in the diagram below (Figure 1).

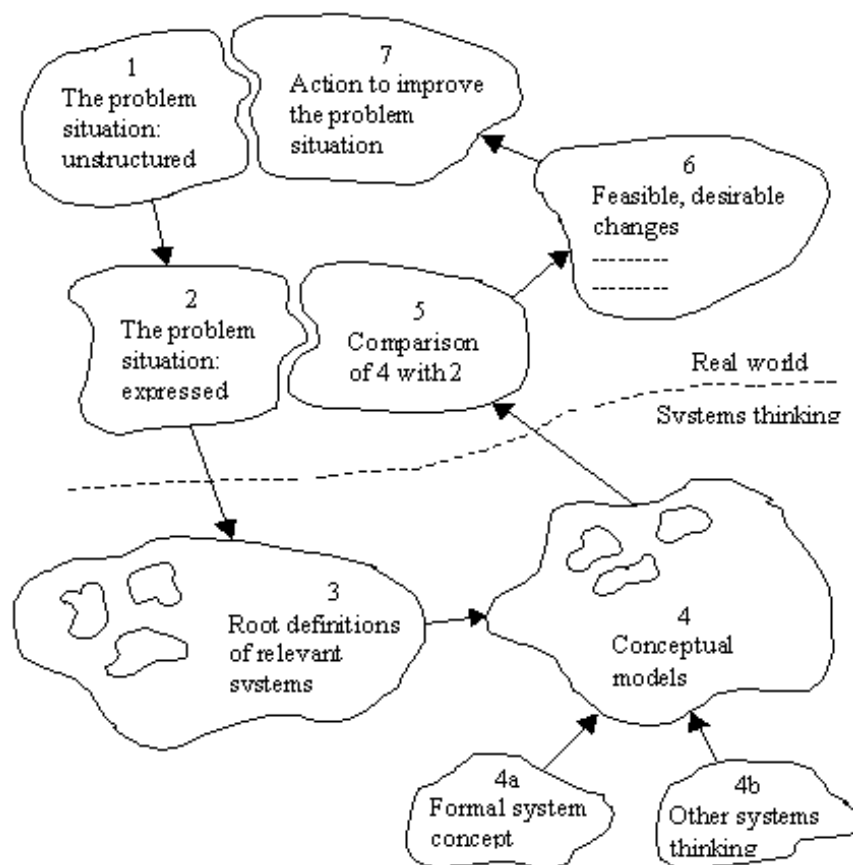


Figure 1 Checkland's Soft System Methodology diagram

According to SSM, the first step of this research was identifying and expressing the problematic situation at Black Creek Community Farm, building an in-depth representation of the system. Then a conceptual model of a changing BCCF system was created. The last steps entailed jumping from the conceptual model to the real life situation, investigating the relevance and feasibility of the ideas gathered in order to implement actions. All opportunities were therefore explored in order to offer concrete proposals for BCCF to move forward.

In line with the holistic approach of the research project, over a period of six months, I used a combination of open-ended surveys and a rich picturing technique (Checkland and Poulter 2006) in order to gather information about the current situation. This perspective was then shared with community members, followed by a visioning session. Finally, all of the data was analysed and interpreted into possible steps that are meant to meet the community's expectations for the present and future of BCCF.

The challenges I faced as an “outsider-researcher” in order to implement this methodology will be explored in the “Discussion” section.

1.3. Tools

The combination of interviews, a visioning workshop, and the less formal brainstorming sessions, as well as the exchanging and discussing of opinions with community members allowed for the collection of precious qualitative data; data which would suggest what could work best for the situation at Black Creek.

1.3.1. Interviews

Twenty people were interviewed between May and August 2013. These comprised mostly of folks from community organizations, farm staff, volunteers and also a few people who were familiar and knowledgeable about the project or external to it but still concerned with food accessibility issues in low-income communities. In addition, two meetings with community groups were organized (mothers at the Early Years Centre and seniors at the Driftwood Community Centre) and records of casual discussions with the community were kept every

week. The data gathered has been useful in understanding and expressing the current situation as well as building recommendations for the future.

Half of the data collected came from spontaneous, unstructured interviews and field observations from living in the community, and the other half was gathered using semi-structured interviews conducted with targeted people.

Semi-structured interviews are open-ended questions—the interviewer has to know and understand the topic at hand in order to anticipate further questions; it is a combination of “grand tour” general questions and “prompts” (Leech 2006). This kind of interview allows the respondents to be the experts on a given topic and inform the researcher. It is important that they feel confident and comfortable from the very beginning. This creates flexibility, allowing both interviewer and interviewee to delve further into detail when needed.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with community members and farm staff. There was a simple checklist of topics that the researcher needed to cover, without giving importance to the order they were covered in. The interaction with the interviewee becomes more of a conversation and the atmosphere is relaxed. It was key here to be neutral and objective. Presenting myself as an international student helped build a confidence relationship with the respondents, with the respondent feeling even closer because of our common point of being an immigrant to Canada.

To conduct a meaningful interview respondents have to be identified and the interviews have to be prepared. That is why four categories were created in order to shape differing interview guidelines according to the interviewees and help with future data analysis: community members; BCCF stakeholders; policy makers and external organizations (more details can be found in the Appendix 1).

The first step to reaching out to the community was identifying key organizations in the area in order to meet up with as many community members as possible (with the core ones being: the Jane and Finch Community and Family Centre, the Early Years Centre, the Black Creek Health Centre, Seniors' Community Centre, “The Spot” youth association (Bryan), schools and churches).

Next, my strategy was to utilize event outreach meetings with Jacqueline Dwyer (community engagement agent at BCCF) and Phillip Liwei (youth coordinator at BCCF) in order

to reach out to the community more easily, meet with key people in the area, and conduct the interviews. The interviews were either one-on-one or questionnaires were given when groups were too large. Finally, intimate interview appointments were organized with policymakers and external organizations.

1.3.2. Rich picturing

The rich picture is a comprehension and communication tool that attempts to grasp the complexity of a system through a simple representation. It has been used here in order to express the situation before jumping into the conceptual world of Soft System Methodology. It brings together perspectives from the largest possible range of sources. Based on the interviews, the literature collected from the partners, and the data available on the City of Toronto's website, I was able to draw a rich picture of the situation. It serves as a valuable information-gathering tool that exists in an easy-to-read and comprehend visual format.

As there are as many perspectives on a given situation as there are stakeholders, this tool was not exclusive but played an important role in feeding the debate and discussion with the community during the visioning session.

1.3.3. The Visioning workshop

The visioning session organized with the community was meant for building a conceptual model of the project. The first step to a visioning workshop is to emphasise that there is no "wrong" vision and no limitations to visioning. A vision can be as fanciful and even impractical as a daydream; it is all about not setting boundaries. By not setting limitations, one is able to see new ideas that may have been dismissed or not realized before. While some of these visions seem unattainable during their initial proposal, if they are given validity and space they have the chance to thrive in the future. Also, with the discussion of "out-there" visions, new more concrete visions can emerge.

This exercise had not been done yet within the community, but imagining where the community wants to go will help in figuring out how to get there. The visioning process expresses that one must move forward in order for change to occur. It is identified as a relevant

tool in order to build more sustainable communities (Minkler 2000). In this case the vision is meant to help figure out the best way to work together in raising awareness and developing access to affordable healthy food in the area.

Damian Adjodha (Everdale farmer and student at York University) and I coordinated the visioning workshop with the community members. It was entitled *Agroecological Community Food Production Systems: “Collective Strategies for Community Food Sovereignty”*. It is part of a series of five agroecological workshops that Damian led, open to anyone in the community. For the visioning session, we made sure that key guests were invited in order to have the best representation of the community as possible. A second workshop took place two weeks later and where outputs from the visioning session were discussed (See Appendix 2 for the guidelines of the visioning session).

The visioning session attempted to establish a space where people of all cultures within the community could meet, share resources, and begin to model the BCCF project. This workshop was designed to enable participants to engage and evaluate the BCCF project by assessing the project’s opportunities for the community and its potential traps.

CHAPTER 2 - Results

2.1. The Context of the Project

2.1.1. Black Creek Community

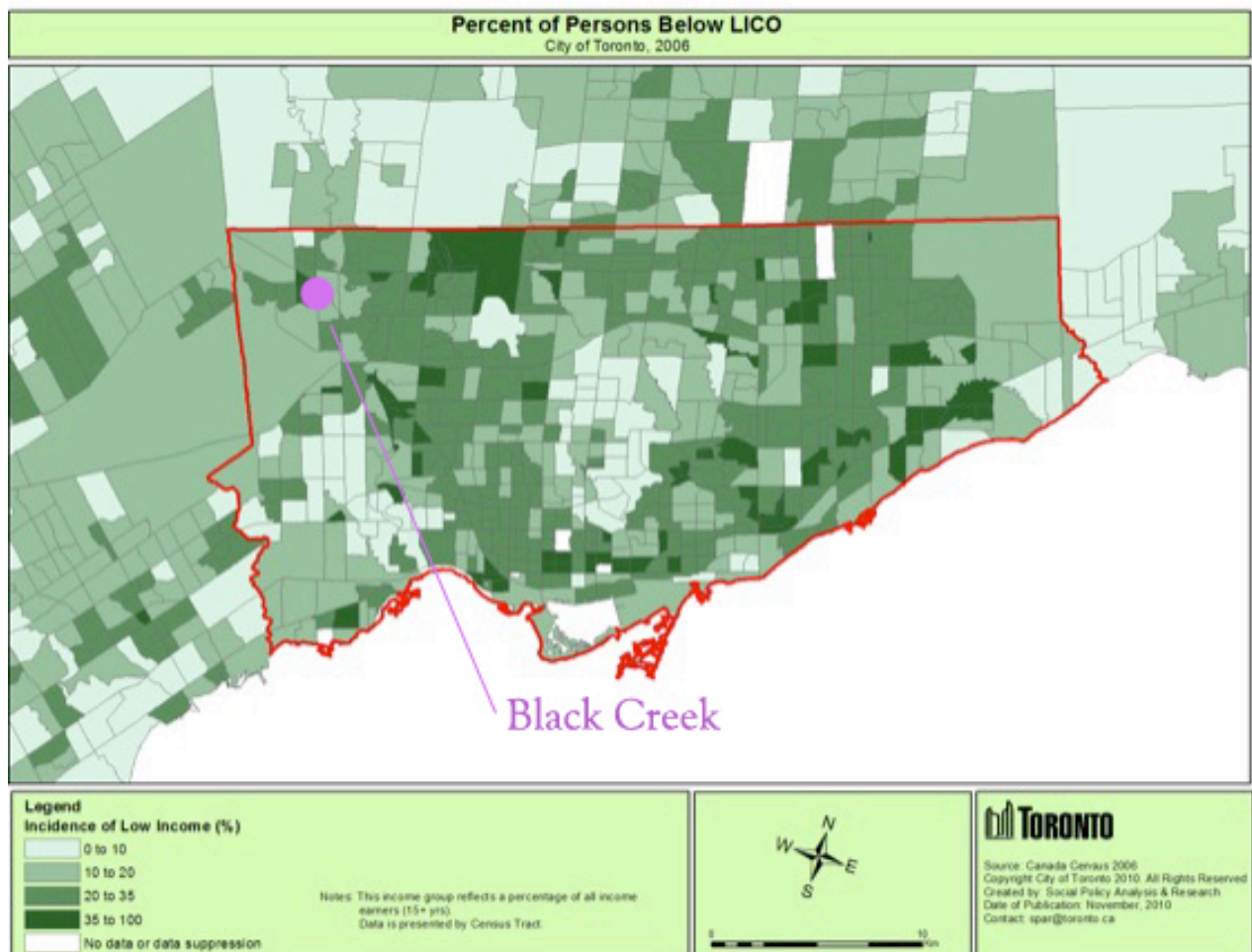
Black Creek encompasses an area that is part of the larger and well-known “*Jane and Finch*” neighbourhood located in the North-West of Toronto. Jane and Finch was originally developed as a model suburb, and included public housing, in response to the rapid urban growth of Toronto in the 1960s. The community is vulnerable as it is mercilessly stigmatized, well known for its cultural diversity and poverty, but also for its gangs and crime, a stereotyped reputation that residents have been striving to overcome for years.

It has now become one of the most densely populated and diverse parts of Toronto. The Black Creek community is made up of 25,000 people, coming from roughly 100 different countries and speaking over 70 languages; with majorities of Caribbean (Jamaican), Asian (Chinese, Vietnamese) and European (Italian) immigrants (Toronto and Region Conservation

Authority 2012). In comparison to other neighbourhoods, Black Creek has the highest rate of single parents, low-income families, unemployment, and adults with less than a high school education. Despite the fact that the percentage of population below the poverty line has decreased from 47% in 1996 to 40% in 2001, as of 2010, the Black Creek area was still the poorest neighbourhood in Toronto with 37% of its population comprised of low-income families (City of Toronto 2010) (see figure 2).

Moreover, in 2009, the Toronto Sun newspaper relayed a Heart and Stroke Foundation survey (a Canadian heart disease-related charity) which showed that the Jane and Finch neighbourhood is one of the most expensive areas in Toronto to buy the basic food a family needs to obtain a wholesome diet (fresh fruits and vegetables, milk, and lean meat). The area has been classified as one of the many food deserts that are cropping up in many North American cities, with food access being the biggest issue (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority 2012).

Figure 2 Incidence of low-income in the city of Toronto (City of Toronto 2010)



Since access to fresh fruits and vegetables is hard to come by in the Black Creek area, the Black Creek Community Farm has a large role to play (and hole to fill) in meeting the community's varying needs, both in terms of food education and supply.

Several interviews conducted by the City of Toronto (in order to establish a neighbourhood profile) concluded that local social connections tended to occur among cultural commonalities, but this is not the case with gardening, where neighbour to neighbour sharing of seeds and skills is constantly occurring (TRCA 2012). This statement gives hope to a project such as the Black Creek Community Farm that aims to gather community members, regardless of their cultural differences. According to the neighbourhood's profile data, there is also a strong vegetable and fruit gardening culture. Residents, mostly from Italian, Vietnamese, and Spanish backgrounds have been growing food in their backyards for decades and therefore already have extensive knowledge and an interest in gardening. The farm could thus be seen as a place to facilitate the sharing of skills, backyards, and produce among community members.

Also through the research method of residing in and being integrated into the community, careful observation has uncovered that Black Creek residents who have limited land tend to set up small vegetable gardens or plant fruit trees in their backyards, demonstrating community members' interest in farming and consuming fresh produce. There is therefore a definite potential in the community to develop urban agriculture on a larger scale.

2.1.2. The Farm History

The Black Creek Community Farm site represents six acres of arable land located near the intersection of Steeles Avenue and Jane Street that used to be a dairy farm, which the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) acquired in 1952 (see Figure 3). The TRCA is one of the largest landowners in the Toronto region, working with the government as well as local communities in order to restore natural areas (MacRae et al. 2010). The eight-acre site at Black Creek includes farming land, some forested areas, a heritage farmhouse with three bedrooms built in 1853, the Braeburn House, and a barn, with both structures having been recently renovated.

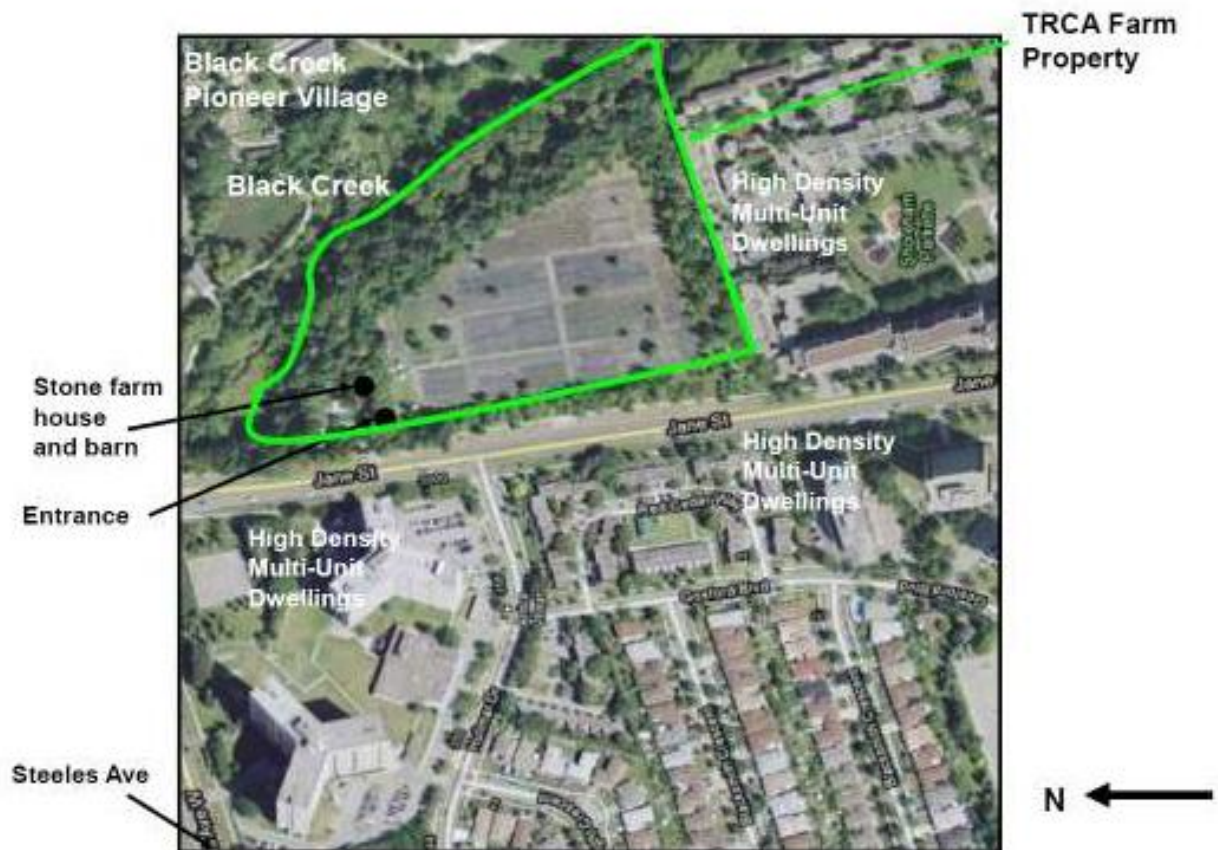


Figure 3 The farm site (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority 2012)

In 2002, the TRCA introduced the concept of transforming the six acres arable of land into urban farm space. The fertility potential of the land is enormous as a result of livestock grazing there for decades, thereby bringing a lot of organic matter to the site and thus improving the clay loam texture of the soil. They turned over the parcel to the City of Toronto's Community Gardens program.

The Toronto Urban Farm, led by Solomon Boyé, was created in 2005 and operated as an extension of the Community Garden Program under the umbrella of the City of Toronto's Parks and Recreation division. The project was addressing more social issues than food security as the focus was made on the training of marginalized youth. Solomon's vision of farming was to use it like a tool to empower youths at risks, "give a meaning to their summer", as others might do with baseball or basketball or other organized sports. From May to August, the youths (up until age 26) were paid to work on the farm and a mentorship relationship was built. Youths were not only taught how to farm but also received assistance with school work as well as more general life coaching such as communication, time management, decision making, etc. Even though the youths had to respect the discipline, most of them came back to the farm to volunteer after their

contract ended. This meaningful job made them realize that they were capable of *doing* something valuable (no machinery was used, everything was done by hand), and they went on to reproduce the work in their own backyards, which allowed them to be proud of themselves and eventually feel more competitive in their professional life thanks to the skills acquired and the confidence built. Afri-Can FoodBasket, a small charity organization, was kindly invited to join the project in 2007, being offered a space on the site to run their program, training 14 youths.

All the food grown was given to local food banks, volunteers, or collected by the youths during a harvest festival once a year, even though certain individuals were quoted as saying that “some vegetables were rotting in the field”, perhaps because of a lack of labour during the fall to harvest.

Finally, in 2010, the city revised its expenses plan and decided that the farm budget was too high according to its outcomes. The city expressed that the farm could have been used more efficiently, especially in regards to food production. Indeed, it was more difficult to evaluate the social benefits achieved than to easily point to the lack of focus on food productivity as nobody kept track of the yields and the food was not sold.

Unfortunately, in 2011, the TRCA’s agreement with the city was not renewed. As a result, the community program was abandoned, despite the fact that it seemed to be a success in its social development aspects for the youths. According to Anan Lololi, the director of Afri-Can FoodBasket, in addition to the fact that community members were involved in the former project’s direction, the general trend was that they enjoyed the program but having been abandoned once before, they were less trustworthy of newer projects. This statement reveals a not-so-appealing community atmosphere where a new community farm project would be started.

2.2. The Case Study: Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF)

The Black Creek Community Farm’s inception began with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) in 2011, whereby the organization released a statement that they were in search of a project to involve the local community of Jane and Steeles as well as conserve the land that existed there. The TRCA has over 40 000 acres of farmland available, with BCCF in a unique position because it exists in an urban space. Everdale, a farm-based charity from the countryside, and the partners that now delegate the fate of BCCF, put forward a proposal that was then approved by the TRCA. Upon this approval, the partners united into a

“steering committee” where they came to conclusions and agreements regarding the vision, mission and objectives of the project.

2.2.1. The Partners

Although Everdale’s work has been recognized in the countryside, its organizers understood that, in order to succeed in a large city-sized project, they would need to build in partnership with other organizations. The result has been an alliance with two well-rooted charities: FoodShare and Afri-Can Food Basket, and a new and expanding local food business, Fresh City Farms.

This coalition represents the steering committee, which has been meeting on a bi-weekly basis for the first year. Each partner has a different role to play and a significant resource commitment (in-kind or financial) as well as being responsible for governance and making decisions on the structure of, function, and planning of the BCCF.

- **Everdale**

Everdale is a not-for-profit charitable organization with a long and successful record of engaging community and building sustainable farm businesses. Their mission is “to be a teaching farm that provides hands-on, solution-based food and farming education to build and engage healthy local communities”.

Everdale has fifteen years of sustainable organic farming experience and proven production systems in Hillsburgh, a village located 80 kilometres west of Toronto. They have also developed a comprehensive set of farmer training programs called Farmers Growing Farmers. These programs give youths and adults the opportunity to start farming as well as an opportunity to harness business skills in order to improve the local food movement.

The vacant lot at Black Creek was the only parcel of urban land large enough to demonstrate the efficient production systems developed by Everdale over the last decades. It therefore seemed to be an excellent opportunity for them to become more engaged in the Toronto urban agriculture scene. It is also a strong foothold into the urban pool of potential farmers that for whatever reason would not be willing to live over an hour outside Toronto for a summer to learn how to farm. The distance between Everdale’s base in Hillsburgh and BCCF does pose a considerable logistical challenge, making partnership with other urban-centred organizations an obvious and prudent solution. Engaging new Canadians, urban, and ethnically

diverse populations is another great opportunity for Everdale to grow in importance within the Greater Toronto Area.

- **FoodShare**

Since 1985, FoodShare has grown to become Toronto's largest not-for-profit organization that focuses on food advocacy, community programming, and assisting community members in accessing the local, organic food that their families need. FoodShare offers a large variety of programs that engage over 150,000 people every month in the city, programs such as: community kitchens (where people can learn to cook together from fresh local ingredients), urban agriculture (training youth to farm), composting and beekeeping workshops, and many more.

Simply the name of the organization is leverage for BCCF, as FoodShare is well known in Toronto and across Canada. The main role of FoodShare at Black Creek Community Farm is to develop and set up a large-scale community windrow-composting program. Although they have a large amount of capital and “administrative capacity” they are lacking in square footage and need an area to compost the waste they produce. BCCF is therefore the perfect spot to do so, as the compost could go back into the Earth, closing the gap in creating a sustainable food system in an urban space. The project is still developing; they are now facing city waste management policies issues. Only a temporary small-scale composting system has been installed this season.

- **Afri-can FoodBasket (AFB)**

Founded in 1995, Afri-Can FoodBasket is a charitable organization that aims to achieve food security for low-income families and youth in Toronto's food desert areas. Volunteers, interns, and youth are taught how to grow food, go to market, and provide affordable organic food for their communities. The aim is to empower people to take food into their own hands, when it is otherwise difficult to provide for their families or sustain themselves in the city.

AFB has achieved such goals in the past through the working of community gardens with the local community, and now in partnership with Everdale their initiative has shifted to transform gardeners and youth into farmers. The BCCF plot allows for a space to do so, and Everdale's funding allows for an expansion and perhaps in-flow of resources to provide such training with newer tools, better irrigation, etc. Focussing on culturally appropriate crops, AFB is finding a flourishing niche market that can bring a new dimension of sustainable production to AFB's community engagement and food security focus.

AFB was training five youths “at risk” on one acre of land at BCCF over the season. It is the organization the most familiar and experienced with farming in the neighbourhood as they were invited by Solomon Boyé to participate in the Toronto Urban Farm. It is therefore very important for the community to have AFB as part of the new project. Locally fresh organic produce is expensive, and often out of reach to the communities AFB wishes to engage, that is why teaming-up with BCCF is key for them to address those challenges all together.

- **Fresh City Farms (FCF)**

Fresh City Farms is a for-profit two-acre urban farm in Toronto, founded in 2010. The farm runs in conjunction with a flexible CSA-box program where customers can order local, fresh, organic fruits, vegetables, and artisanal produce (bread, cheese, etc.) and have it delivered to their door by bike or car. Interested in expanding urban agriculture in Toronto, its co-founders decided to also train twenty urban farmers so as to become sustainable throughout every season and get the public more involved and interested in farming and food.

Fresh City Farms and its organizers first and foremost see themselves as a “social enterprise”. Indeed this is a major way in, which, as an organization, it has boomed exponentially, and created an appetite for local food. However having put concentration into becoming a social enterprise over a community farm has brought about a large turnover of member farmers, interns, and volunteers. Fresh City has, on the other hand, certainly fostered and incubated many farmers over the years, and has definitely given room for experimentation to people who otherwise would have never had the opportunity to farm their own land. The Fresh City—Everdale partnership exists as a win-win situation: BCCF benefits from FCF as they are well rooted in the commercial urban agriculture scene in Toronto while FCF also benefits from the BCCF’s outreach capacity in terms of communication (as a vitrine for the company). Also, FCF needs a more stable “base”, as Fresh City’s greenhouse and property is rented at Downsview Park and the situation is not sustainable there because their contract might not be renewed there every year. The land at BCCF is also more valuable as it is more fertile than the one at Downsview Park. Fresh City Farms was only farming a one-acre plot this season at BCCF.

- **Supporting partners**

Ryerson University’s Sustainability Program, York University’s Faculty of Environmental Studies and the University of Toronto are all organizations that are involved as guidance

councillors to the project, supporting partners like the TRCA. A group of researchers coming from the three universities and led by Wally Seccombe from Everdale will be working on the Health Impact Assessment report at the end of the season.

2.2.2. Diagram of the BCCF System

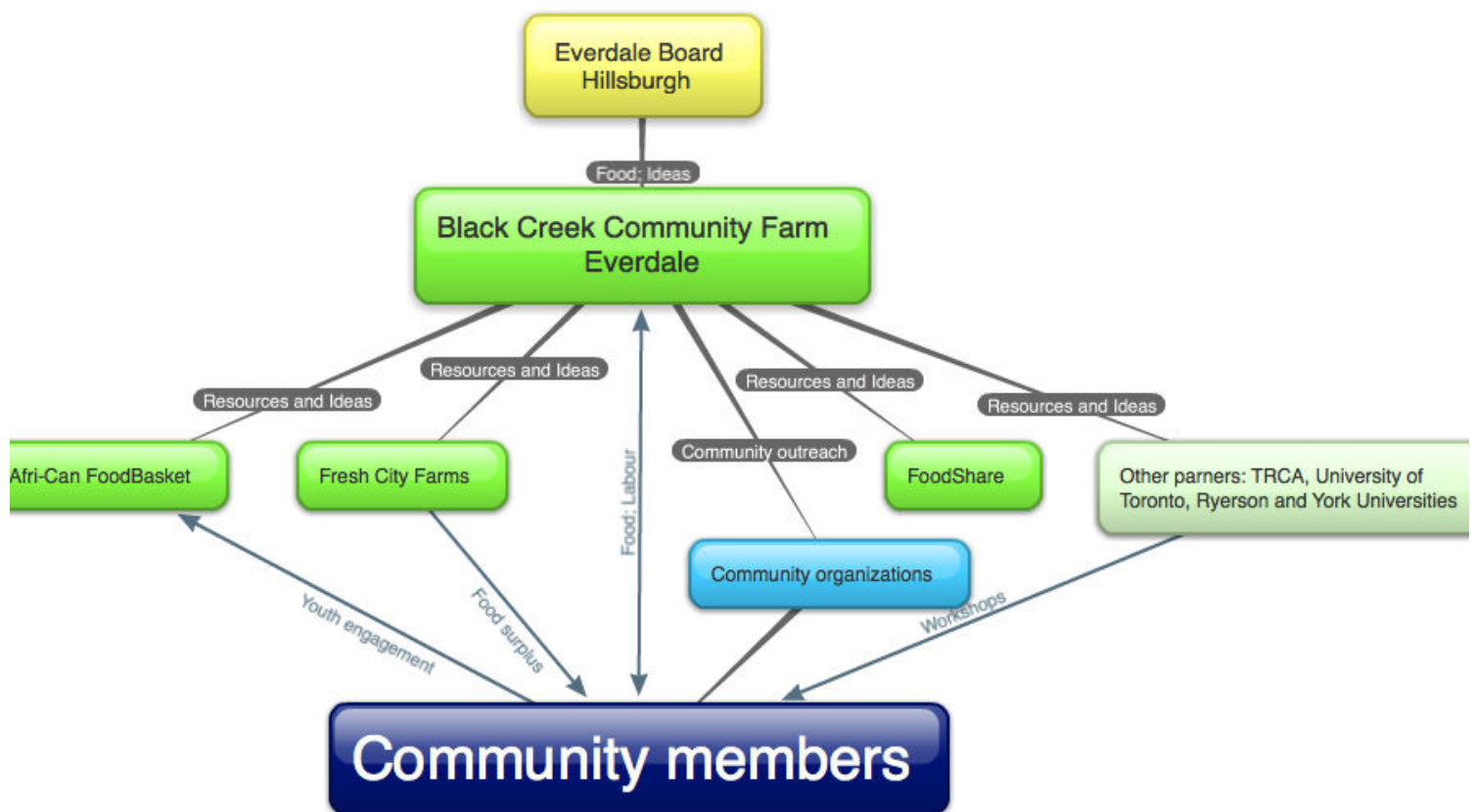


Figure 4 BCCF system diagram

This is a diagram of the current situation, representing the system's main actors. The governing structure of BCCF could be subject to change but as it stands Everdale is the main governing body, with the lease of the farm and farmhouse issued to them and with the other steering committee partners (AFB, FCF, FoodShare) as funding contributors and physically present farm and meeting delegates.

We can see that the system studied (here in green) is not working as a single unit but more as a partnership between different entities that are targeting (but not including) community members within their boundaries. They are mostly seen as workers or consumers. Everdale's partners also participate in the general sharing of ideas and resources but each of them runs their own separate projects at the BCCF site, which are not necessarily united and very inclusive of

the community. The partners are disconnected from Everdale's main project that is directed by people living in Hillsburgh, and the community only plays a secondary role, most often left to exist as external observers. Even though Everdale hires a few people from the community and some of the produce is sold to the community, residents of the Black Creek area are involved neither in the decision-making process nor the sharing of resources and ideas. This illustrates the top-down approach which exists there, with Everdale having decision-making power even though many ideas could potentially be shared at all levels of the farm.

BCCF's other partners (including the TRCA and universities) as well as the various community organizations do not have a large role within the existing system even though they are key supporters and have great potential in bridging the gap and improving communication between farm and community in the future.

2.2.3. The 2013 Season and Opening of the Farm

Everdale hired nine farmers, including five interns, for the 2013 season, and the majority of them come from the impoverished Jane and Finch area. The selection was not based on farming background or experience and the team formed was thereby very diverse. No real orientation tool was offered at the beginning for breaking down cultural barriers and building a farm team spirit atmosphere. As there is no infrastructure yet, farmers had to start seedlings early in spring at the greenhouses in Hillsburgh that they then transplanted to the field at Black Creek. They also participated in varied tasks such as renovating the house or fixing the old irrigation system. A schedule of duties was made each week with roles distributed among the farmers. The farmhouse serves as private housing for one of the farmers but also as an office, storage and meeting place for the partners and the community. Damian Adjodha, a Master's student at York University, was in charge of planting a nice welcoming garden at the entrance of the field. This served as a space for the community to come and relax under the shade of a tree and discover what farming with nature is all about; the garden was diverse and colourful.

Everdale received grants to hire two community agents and one youth coordinator with a six months contract. The youth coordinator, Philip Liwei, is inspired by alternative experiential education which is a movement that focuses on character development, the process of relationship building and engagement, and creative ways to express and communicate. He started different projects such as:

- Hosting martial arts at the farm field, connecting and strengthening the mind/body, self-discipline and respect, and building a relationship with the land, a project that was already implemented at the Toronto Urban Farm with the community martial arts club;
- A partnership with Tropicana Community Services, a Toronto-based organization not to be mistaken with the juice brand, which provides youth of Black and Caribbean heritage an opportunity to learn & gain hands-on skills through full-time community-based work, funded by the government. Six youths were therefore helping at the farm for two months
- Guided farm tours and discussions with youth groups visiting, many of which come from both inside and outside the community.

The two community agents were mostly working on the organization and logistics of the public events: the Grand Opening Farm Festival and the Fundraising Supper—both of which took place in July. Tickets for the Fundraising Supper were sold at \$85 in order to fundraise for the financing of the following Farm Festival. Local artists performed and a silent auction took place. Outreach such as distributing flyers or giving speeches to local organizations was also done in order to invite community members to the Farm Festival. Despite the bad weather, the Farm Festival event was a great success, with approximately 400 people showing up. Local and non-local food vendors were there offering healthy food at an affordable price. Community members showed up but also folks from the downtown and surrounding Toronto region. People enjoyed tours of the farm and its surrounding conservation land, delicious food, live music, the children's activities that involved mostly playing with dirt, and an on-site market.

The second main community events that took place on-site during the season were the series of five workshops conducted by Damian Adjodha from May to July. The purpose of his research was developing workshops that effectively gathered and engaged community members and generated interest around the concept of individual and family food sovereignty. It aimed to find efficient strategies to deliver practical and replicable workshop models that could produce measurable results towards improved community food sovereignty. “This can only be achieved if communities are empowered with scientific/technical knowledge and practical food sovereignty skills” (Damian Adjodha). The different topics of the workshops can be found in Appendix 3.

The workshops took place between 6 to 8:30 pm at the welcoming garden in the BCCF field. They were free and open to all the residents of the community. The workshop series were

the beginning of an evolving culturally grounded educational commitment of the project to the community.

On the same topic of local food access, a program called “Harvest Share” has been established at Black Creek. It is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system where people can choose among a wide variety of fresh seasonal fruits, vegetables and herbs from local farmers whenever customers come to pick up their produce. The produce is grown both at Black Creek and in Hillsburgh, Everdale’s “country base”, thereby building a connection between urban and rural farms. The program runs from June to November and is meant to serve people that reside or work within a 15-minute radius of the farm.

In order to make food more accessible to the community, Harvest Share’s pricing is defined according to the average household’s yearly income, divided into three categories: “Above \$45,000”, “\$30,000-45,000”, and “Under \$30,000”. The price for the first category is the actual cost of the food, which covers a decent wage for the farmers and the total expenses of production. The other two price ranges are offered at subsidized rates (15% off for the “\$30,000-45,000” category and 30% off for the “Under \$30,000”). Everdale therefore compensates by raising money from donations or grants in order to sustain itself and afford to offer this price break to lower-income families. Another option for community residents is the “Working Share” program, which consists of residents working on the farm or in the farm store one day a week throughout the season in exchange for produce (the size of the share depends on the number of hours worked). Only one community resident signed for the working share program throughout the summer and they had about 25 members subscribed to the Harvest Share program, with half of them being farm staff or partners.

The farm is also selling its produce at three different farmers’ markets including two located in downtown Toronto: the Wychwood Barns and the Brickworks farmers’ markets on Saturdays. The third one is established in the park of the Driftwood Community centre, close to the intersection of Jane Street and Driftwood Avenue, every Wednesday. On occasion, Fresh City Farms would send me to join this market with Everdale over the summer when they had surplus to sell at a discounted price. This gave me a first person hands-on experience with the community. This farmers’ market needs more support to sustain itself, as one booth in a park was not nearly enough to engage the entire community in the way it needs to be activated and educated about what Black Creek Community Farm is trying to accomplish.

2.3. Rich Picture



Figure 5 Rich Picture of the current situation

This picture represents the current situation at BCCF for the duration of its first season, including the different partners and different scales at which different organizations are or could

be involved. The most significant different flows of food, money, and human resources are also schematized.

We can see that BCCF is not the only level at which the steering committee partners are involved. This leads to a complicated situation as for all of them BCCF seems to be simply another project among others.

It is important to note here that most of the connections with the farm (in terms of resources, ideas and food flows) are made outside of the community level, which is surprising for a community farm. For example, so far only a small part of the vegetables produced on the BCCF site goes into the community, mainly through the Driftwood farmers' market as well as the Harvest Share Program. This flow is well established in the Hillsburgh community and in downtown Toronto, but has not really taken off in the Black Creek community this past season. A lot of produce that is sold to the community is not only produced on-site but also supplemented with produce from the countryside, including Everdale's farm in Hillsburgh and other large local organic farms (for crops such as onions, potatoes, etc.). This brings more diversity to choose from but can also affect the final prices as the food travels more. This variety can also be found at Wychwood Barns and the Brickworks farmers' market located in downtown Toronto, areas that are wealthier than Black Creek. As a result of large purchasing power and the reputation of these markets, Everdale is able to sell a lot of produce in a single day there. This makes these markets interesting and attractive, as they are more profitable in comparison with the Driftwood market.

Concerning grant flows; Everdale hires a team of fundraisers that are located at their farm base in Hillsburgh, where they write applications for the funding of both sites.

Despite the fact that some residents of the Black Creek area have been hired by Everdale and invited to events such as the Farm Festival or the workshops, it appears that the objective of reaching out the community and improving access to food in the neighbourhood were not the first priorities on the partners' agenda for the first year. All the energy was essentially put into starting up the farm's production and into shaping and designing the area in order to make it into a nice, efficient and welcoming workspace.

It is also worth noting a lack of connections with the key components of any local food system: schools, restaurants and catering businesses; they are places that are more likely to afford to buy the food grown on the farm (more than a low-income family) in order to then use it within the community.

2.4. The Visions

2.4.1. *The 2012 Partners' Vision*

The steering committee sees BCCF as an extremely important project and sees themselves as greatly responsible for the surrounding events that ensue as a result of its existence (which includes: the education of local farmers, community engagement, local food security, etc.). Their belief is that strong “short, medium, and long term vision(s)” are a key to their realization of a sustainable farm.

The 2012 partners' vision for the farm is therefore to provide the local community with fresh food while at the same time offering people the opportunity to be trained as farmers. In addition, it claims to provide an inspirational model for other cities around the world by re-thinking urban food and farming systems (see Appendix 4 for the draft map of the future wanted site that the partners designed after the visioning). The emphasis is put on productivity and having a “working farm”. Indeed, what makes this project unique is its large scale: six acres of fertile land are enough space to have a productive farm, unlike the previous project at Black Creek which focused on building community through youth training but forgetting to utilize the land or redistribute food efficiently, possibly because of a lack of means and the necessary tools to do so.

The aim of the BCCF project as defined on Everdale's website is a “farm (that) will be staffed and supported by community residents and (of which) the harvests of fresh, healthy food will feed the local community. The farm will also be an intergenerational place of learning and training where youth will reconnect to the story of their food, a new generation of urban farmers will be trained and the community will gather.”

The partners' 2012 vision was even more elaborate, stating that they would like the community to “take ownership” of the farm, specifying that engagement is seen here as “full involvement of the community in decision-making in order to help develop and grow the project with the needs, expressions and aspirations of the community at the centre of inquiry”.

Five main vision statements were established:

- Serve and inspire the local community
- Build community food security by growing fresh, healthy food
- Support diverse natural and social ecosystems

- Create new and dynamic economic opportunities through hands-on training and intergenerational learning experiences
- Provide a food justice leadership model for other communities

From the visioning session held in 2012, the steering committee and partners addressed two key challenges to the project: engaging the community, and developing access to healthy food at affordable prices. Even at such an early time of the project's life, the community was not well represented at the visioning workshop. It was then that the partners realized that community was a key component of a sustainable system (they even changed the name from "Black Creek Urban Farm" to "Black Creek Community Farm" after the visioning session). Developing access to healthy food in Black Creek community would mean that all efforts should be put into community engagement and education, "to raise awareness around the importance of quality food". A similar bottom-up systemic approach for this research is therefore needed and the BCCF must be driven and guided by community members.

The project also meets Everdale's long-term vision to create a large CSA farmer cooperative with several other local organic farms, thereby bridging the gap with rural areas (Dandy 2008).

2.4.2. The 2013 Community Vision

From their own visioning session, the community organized their ideas and identified four key shared values for the future of the project.

▪ Unity

The residents imagined the farm as a tool to strengthen the sense of community and grow hope, as well as building residents' dignity by showing the "world" that the Black Creek community is not as hopeless as some like to think. The farm would be a free and safe space with no discrimination. It would be a place to come to with the whole family, children and grandparents too, in order to reconnect with the land and with nature. Transparency and honesty would be the drivers of the project. Integrity, cohesion, understanding, and resilience are the key words for unity.

Social links are created through farming. The idea is to farm together, not in isolation from one another. Food is seen as the nucleus of the community. There is a seed bank on the farm that

residents could have access to and gather at to trade and share the ones they saved from their own garden.

- **Education and Inter-generational Exchange**

The biodiversity and natural identity of the site would be lay the foundation for education. People are eager to learn about food related subjects in diverse contexts such as: sustainable growing techniques, nutrition, cooking, storing and composting. There should be some practical training programs available such as how to utilize small spaces efficiently such as balconies or backyards in order to grow food, as well as more elaborate information and knowledge about permaculture or food forest agroecosystems.

People should be able to attend lectures on site and more and more residents should become aware of the fact that eating local is important. A botanical garden would be used as an interesting tool for education, but also for research and conservation.

The educational dimension at BCCF should not have age barriers. The farm is thus a place where generations are blended together through the sharing of experiences. Community activities on-site such as story telling evenings around the fire-pit would strengthen such links.

The vision is to gather and keep the community involved in a growing a food culture with a consistent creative force. The farm will become a space where farming wisdom and information could be shared across age groups and diverse cultures.

- **Bring diversity: agriculture and local culture (arts, music, etc.)**

The farm has to immerse itself in the community's diversity. Agriculture is meant to build cultures. All the diverse cultures and skills available in the neighbourhood are therefore represented on the farm. The farm offers room for people to practice visual or performing arts and be inspired. It should also be a place where art exhibitions take place to promote the work of emerging local artists and bring diversity to the project as well as attract the larger public from surrounding neighbourhoods.

It should be a space where one becomes inspired to compose or write a song under the tree of the community welcoming garden, for painting while being surrounded by nature, and for playing music after work or school.

The farm combines agriculture and arts for therapy to cure mental illnesses. The field and encompassing forest areas are designed as a piece of art, arranging plants to create something

original and inspiring families to maybe take a hike as if they were in a park enjoying the beauty of nature.

- **Access to food and land**

As a community farm, BCCF should involve the community in farming activities and residents should have access to a space to grow on site like in community gardens, or common garden plots. The space should support international farmers to grow international vegetables. People should have the ability and means to grow culturally appropriate food and therefore eat fresh local produce more often. They also should have the freedom to innovate through experiments with different cropping styles like vertical gardening or permaculture.

Perennial crops should be thriving there; the native berries and fruit trees should be ready for harvesting through a “pick-your-own” program. Food is sold on site and people can simply stop by the farm store to buy produce. People have access to year round healthy organic food and a barter system is set in place in order to trade food, skills, and services for those who do not wish to use money.

The community also has access to business opportunities and processing food on a larger scale as well as selling their own products through or at the farm (healthy juices and smoothies have been mentioned for example).

Food and nature is seen as a gateway away from bad diet habits, city stress, and pollution, thereby revitalizing the neighbourhood.

2.4.3. Comparison of the Visions

Some similarities can be found between the partners’ vision from last year and the vision of the community established this past season. The partners’ vision highlights “food and social justice” which refers to the potentials of social inclusion and the bringing together of diverse cultures as well as the improvement of healthy food access. The community members also share this vision.

Education and inter-generational and cultural exchange are also values that both the community and the partners want the farm to address. The common vision is clear: the educational dimension of the farm has to be huge, reaching schools and universities but also and most importantly the general public across all ages. Ideas for themes of the workshops developed

by the partners such as food preservation, cooking, nutrition, medicinal herbs, animal husbandry and beekeeping also seem to meet the community's vision.

The forest restoration project and the idea of developing a "Forest Interpretative Trail" (see Appendix) on the farm property are also in accordance with the community vision of having a place to hang out with families.

The largest gap existing between the two visions stems clearly from who gains access to the land. On the one hand, the community expects part of the plot to be accessible for them to farm and on the other hand Everdale, the leader of the project, wants a "working" farm with no community gardens. Perhaps the assumption is that such plots would affect the potential productivity of the farm, as the area available for growing cash crops would then be reduced. No land should be underused according to the leading organization. A compromise must be reached in order to satisfy both parties and show the community that the door is not totally closed.

Even though the partners mentioned a place for creativity and art, it was not identified as a key value in opposition to the community vision that gave importance to this cultural dimension.

Another sizeable difference between the two visions was the partners' emphasis on the productive and economic benefits of the farm whereas it did not seem to be a priority for the community members at all.

CHAPTER 3 - Necessary Steps to Moving Forward

This panel of potential solutions for the future, are a compilation of what was voiced by the community during: the visioning session, from various farm events (Grand Opening, workshops, tours), from personal conversations with community members during my everyday life at the farm, at the Driftwood Community Centre market, and finally from personal reflection, sometimes inspired by relevant examples of urban farms dealing with similar community issues (Growing Home Chicago, The Stop Community Food Centre's approaches). It is a set of actions that BCCF could undertake in order to serve the community better and fulfil its role best. Those steps to move forward are classified according to the two related objectives of the research, which are community engagement and developing access to affordable, healthy food.

As previously stated, this was BCCF's first season in practical existence and so as mentioned by some of the individuals interviewed, building community and developing access to healthy food are both processes that require time in order to grow and progress.

3.1. Community Engagement

3.1.1. Creation of a Community Board

This process involves identifying key people from the Black Creek area, people that are natural-born wise leaders within the community and creating an advisory committee from the community itself. The community needs a voice; the Community Board (or Community Collective) must be put in place for a bottom-up approach to be implemented, acting as a buffer between the community and the steering committee, and including a chair member that would attend all of the BCCF board meetings with the partners. The best option would be a person who is also involved in the farming activities as well; such as a hired farmer who is given a larger role. This committee would work together with all of the partners and thus must be included in and must sign the collaboration agreement (Memorandum of Understanding). They would meet at the farm on a regular basis and discuss all of the different issues that the project is facing, guiding the partners towards a more sustainable community-based project.

Many community members expressed a strong interest in creating or playing a hand in a consultative community board that would be integrated into BCCF's structure. The community workshops including the visioning session provided the launch pad for community members to lay down various future plans intended to further engage the community. Community members took on this voluntary organization completely independently following the wrapping up of the workshop. These community leaders, identified in Appendix 5, showed sufficient interest in the project to eventually be a part of this community board.

Community members could then finally move from mere observers to actors of change.

3.1.2. Offer Access to the Land

Community gardens would be a way to both engage people and give them access to food they could grow themselves. However, it is not part of Everdale's plan. An argument could be that such gardens are usually exclusive as not everyone can participate in these programs, moreover many people may say they want to garden but a much smaller percentage actually does (de la Salle & Holland 2010). An alternative based on the multi-stakeholder dimension of the

farm and looking at Fresh City Farms' "member farmers" program model, can be explored for BCCF. If the model works, Everdale could begin implementing it to BCCF as well.

The idea behind Fresh City Farms is that individuals can receive a plot but need to be involved with the entire farm. The member farmers learn how to become self-sufficient commercial farmers.

For example, Black Creek residents could sign a contract with FCF and become a member farmer with access to 1000 square feet at BCCF. Even though the current FCF program is run at the Downsview park plot, a few spots (five to ten) could be left by FCF for those at BCCF in order to create a "Black Creek community member farmers" program. The Black Creek member farmers would therefore do their workshift on FCF's plot at BCCF. FCF farms only one acre at BCCF but this is 43,560 square feet so just a few plots of 1000 square feet would not reduce FCF's overall available surface area for production too much. Plus it can be an asset for the organization to have reliable labour available from the community, as FCF's production manager cannot be present on-site every day. Finally it could even build connections between urban farmers from different neighbourhoods, thereby erasing the stigma and creating a community network of urban growers.

Figure 6 Welcoming garden at BCCF



Even if Everdale does not wish to include community gardens in their layout in order to keep a working farm, leaving the welcoming garden's plot management to the community board as they adapt it into a "Community Welcoming Garden" could serve as another alternative to explore. Indeed although this year Damian Adjodha was the one who established the garden, very often it was several community members who gave a hand and at times "illegally" took care of it and therefore received free vegetables in exchange. This was not happening "officially" but shows the real potential that already exists there that could be implemented for a change with the coming of the next season, as Damian only had the responsibility to implement this garden for the first year.

Finally, it is important to mention that there should not be too much caution taken with new people coming on-site to visit or simply relax. Especially because one of the common visions among both partners and community members alike was the creation of more spaces and paths for community groups to have access to on site and because leaving the door open is a strong positive sign to the community that is likely to become engaged. Some farm tours also must be organized on a more regular basis, for example every month, with community organizations such as the Jane and Finch Family Centre, the Driftwood Community Centre, and "The Spot" Youth Association.

3.1.3. Food Celebration

Raising awareness about eating healthy can be coupled with the celebration of food through food-related community events on the farm. The Grand Opening Farm Festival was a success even though the community could have been more represented (with a showcase of community skills in the realm of music and arts). At least one or two large events such as the Farm Festival should be planned for following seasons. The farm recently received a grant in September to build the Pavillon (see draft map in Appendix 4), which will include a certified community kitchen that meets health and safety regulations. This new facility offers the farm opportunities to now welcome community events that require food to be processed on-site. The Farm Festival should recur next year, as it was a great success. Other events to celebrate the act of food consumption and the enjoyment of healthy food could take the form of:

- An international food festival or community potluck: community members could register and build teams representing different countries. Each team could be given \$30 and three

ingredients from the farm of their choosing in order to prepare a dish from their own country. Then a giant potluck can be organized on-site, with people paying a \$1 food ticket at the entrance with the right to sample three different dishes. A jury could finally attribute a prize to the tastiest food team.

- A Harvest Festival: each year, at the time that BCCF harvests its main crop (it could be in September with carrots as an example), an event to celebrate the harvest could be organized, inviting the community to participate in the harvest as well as to share some food cooked with any crops that have reached maturity around the time of the festival.
- Children's parties in order to celebrate community youths' birthdays on the farm, with healthier birthdays comprised of fresh food from the farm (carrot cake for example) and a series of games and activities for the day. This could be priced similar to a McDonald's birthday party, but way healthier and more fun because of the unique natural environment and food from the farm.
- Wedding spaces where people could rent the area for the weekend and organize community weddings. It would be a great way to raise some money for the farm as well as offering low-income community members the opportunity to afford a wedding within a nice environment close to what can be offered in the countryside (with a heritage stone house, farm, and forest).

3.1.4. Education and Inter-Generational Exchange

The idea behind the exchange is to take advantage of having a natural, wild and productive space (included is a list of wildlife spotted on site in Appendix 6) right in the middle of a deprived neighbourhood and offer residents the opportunity to get together in this green environment and learn about food security and achieving a healthy lifestyle. Engaging people on the farm and raising their awareness about food issues are the keys to triggering a shift in consumerist habits. Community members must be made aware that BCCF is not only a farming business but also a welcoming place for those who want to move towards healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families. That is why food education must play a major role here.

A wide range of workshops can be organized and be made open to the public, as was the case this past year. More open communication about the programs would be needed however, and there should be no vocabulary or language barriers in order for community members to feel

comfortable. The City of Toronto and different partners such as the universities could help implement the programs by providing resources, means, and materials.

The levels and themes of the educational material treated should obviously be adapted to the public whether designed for kids or adults. The subjects can deal with topics as diverse as: the nutritional aspects of food, soil biology, storing food, composting, permaculture, and small space farming, but also should deal with leadership and business methods as well as natural conservation and ecological principles. Teaching farming is always more efficient and engaging when set up outside in the field as opposed to in a closed room with a PowerPoint going. That is why the teaching method must have a practical, hands-on dimension to it. This will build people's self-confidence when using tools that they are not familiar with, and this in turn could be knowledge that will be used to eventually create gardens elsewhere. Finally, functional cooking and food processing workshops (e.g. pickle canning) could be held once the Pavillon is created. Bringing the community to cook a meal together and then sharing it is something that happens in other organizations and has proven positive results in terms of the improvement of dietary habits thanks to the new cooking skills acquired. It is also important to teach community members about the seasonable vegetables that grow in Canada, as one may have for example never seen a turnip before. Learning about these new vegetables from first growing the plant to seeing it cooked on the plate could result in people becoming more familiar with them and beginning to include them in their diet.

Thanks to the rural dimension of Everdale, which has its base outside of Toronto with some livestock (chickens, sheep, etc.), there is a great opportunity to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas by organizing programs that bring youths from Jane and Finch to Hillsburgh. This would allow them to have a trip outside of the city, and give them the chance to take care of farm animals, as raising chicken in Toronto is still illegal even though policy makers are working on changing the zoning laws. These programs could take the form of a "summer camp" such as the one Everdale already has in place in the countryside and which is already benefiting from grants to help low-income families afford it. It would be valuable for the community to offer the same opportunity at Black Creek.

The community inter-generational relationships could be fostered through bonfire storytelling nights that gather people of all ages telling stories about specific food topics related to culture, traditions, and origins. The use of fire as a human gathering tool would help promote the sharing between generations.

Visioning could be used again as a tool to continue to engage the community. Just before leaving Canada in August, BCCF had a general meeting where I received feedback on the last few months. The visioning session appeared to be a success and BCCF partners expressed that they would like to implement it on a larger scale. It was difficult to implement that request this year but it might be possible for the next season, as more connections and links within the neighbourhood are created. The session could take place at the Driftwood Community Centre where there is more room available and could be a session gathering all of the stakeholders, not only community members or the BCCF steering committee but also all the local organizations willing to get involved. This event could be organized and prepared during the fall, based on the current season's workshop, to make sure it will be well attended in spring.

3.1.5. Bringing Community Arts and Culture onto the Farm

Community identity has to be represented on site in order to build a place where residents will feel at ease, as well as a place where the mingling of different cultures will give them another reason to visit the farm and not only "food".

Before this coming winter, a mural will be designed with local artists that will be installed along the fence on Jane Street close to the farm's entrance. This is a good start to welcoming people with local art. The visual impact of the farm is very important to getting people more engaged with its processes.

Recommendations could be to either directly involve residents by for example hosting community art exhibitions at the farm or indirectly through the adding of cultural aspects to current or future projects on the farm. For example, the welcoming garden as a permanent instalment could integrate art pieces, thereby creating an art garden. Schools or local artists could be involved to design mosaics or sculptures.

Local artists should be able to come when looking for inspiration, a place to work within nature or simply bring some cultural fun to the farm. Many of community members as well as some of the BCCF staff are musicians and music is a great way to attract people to a space and creates a pleasant atmosphere to work in.

Plus, given the feedback from community members after the Grand Opening Farm Festival, it seems that community arts and culture were missing. The festival did not represent community energy sufficiently. Cultural activities could eventually include a poetry slam,

writing or food related photography contests, outdoor cinema nights during summer, and so on. Any of these events are a great opportunity to promote the farm to the community, attract people that would have not otherwise come simply for the food, and sell fresh or cooked produce from the farm to the community.

The initiative of a partnership between the local martial arts club and BCCF has to be expanded to include other community associations, such as Yoga groups for example, encouraging safe environments.

3.1.6. Best Means to Reach the Community

There are certain steps that have been taken by BCCF to reach out to the community, such as posting a large mobile sign at the farm's entrance on Jane Street, as well as building a large mural that will come to fruition in the fall. Some flyers have been distributed in mailboxes, at the Wednesday farmers' market, and posters have been pasted in the Jane and Finch local shopping mall or local shops, as well as in infrastructures that exist to support the local community such as community centres. It is difficult to assess the efficiency of such techniques as people sometimes discard flyers without reading through them, assuming them to be junk mail.

The opportunities to reach the community are vast but more importance should to be given to communication techniques in order to develop efficient community engagement. The means in which communication is made must also be accessible in order to be efficient, that is to say that no technical or complicated language should be used (which may have been the case with this past season's workshop flyers), and an effort should be made to translate material into as many languages as possible.

The most efficient technique is most likely meeting with community organisations and talking directly to people. Targeting churches and religious or sacred places where community members gather is also an option. This is interactive and community members can ask all the questions they desire. It is therefore easier to persuade them of the benefits tied to a community farm and remove any doubts that may arise.

Events that bring people *to* the farm are the best tools. The community can actually see and experience what is happening at the farm and if they have a wonderful time, then they will surely come again. A higher frequency of open-farm days and tours is needed, especially at the early stages of the project.

The farm is a place full of hope where people share similar interests for nature and healthy food. Getting together and gathering forces shows one that change and progress are possible. The farm as a result has the potential to encourage people to modify their food choices for the better. People might say “Yes, I live at Jane and Finch and still I am eating healthy, even though I do not have much money”. Likewise they might realize that healthy fresh vegetables can be accessible. After visiting the farm and participating in its activities, community members could feel more capable, competent, and empowered to have a healthier diet and eventually grow their own food.

Schools also represent a great opportunity to use children as catalysts for the project. As children are the future their curiosity could be utilized so that when they grow up with the farm so close by they might get involved more seriously later on in their lives. It can also be a means to reach parents as well (one example is a resident who came to an event with his daughter and stated that “she (was) the one excited about the farm”).

A decent BCCF website would be an asset. A website is needed that is much more explicit and informative than the current one, which is actually under Everdale’s website and not as an independently established multi-partners organization. This online platform for the community could collect all the information they needed in detail and offer the opportunity for them to express themselves, thereby cultivating the communication between farm and community.

Finally, hiring people from the community as much as possible is a must. Before opening job opportunities up to the “public”, one must first look at hiring people within the community through local organizations. The farm must act as beneficial as much as possible to the community and residents’ skills must have top priority. The Black Creek Community Farm website would also be useful in communicating this kind of information as well.

3.2. Access to Affordable, Healthy Food

3.2.1. Improve the Harvest Share Program

Some lessons can be taken from BCCF’s first season, especially in regards to the Harvest Share program. Even though the number of people participating in the program kept increasing throughout the season reaching a grand total of about 25 members, it was not representative of the general community as half of the members were from the staff or other community

organizations. This was only the first year of the program's implementation in the neighbourhood so this should eventually change with the coming seasons. More communication is therefore needed about the program in order to root it more powerfully in the community. So far feedback from the community suggested incomprehension as to how things operated as most of the people in the area had no idea what a CSA is. It appears that the program also does not necessarily meet the needs of the community in terms of food security. Community members would rather buy from the farmers market or a farm shop open on site at defined hours because the Harvest Share program is too much of an economic commitment that most residents just cannot afford, thereby creating even more of a disconnect between what the community desires as solutions for food access and what is offered by the farm.

Sometimes, suburban CSA shareholders are willing to participate in "Adopt-A-Share programs" so that others in need can have access to local food grown at a discounted price (Carter and Brown 2003). That is to say that the Harvest Share members in wealthier areas such as downtown Toronto or Hillsburgh could pay extra money for their produce in order to finance the fresh food basket of a family in need at Black Creek. This sort of sponsorship system could also foster more of an urban and rural link as well as remove some of the stigmas associated with the more impoverished neighbourhood.

More value, communication efforts, and advertisement space should be given to the "Working Share" program that is run alongside the Harvest Share program. Unemployed individuals, of which this represents 10 to 15% of the neighbourhood's inhabitants (TRCA 2012), could spend less money on food and occupy their time getting involved with the community project gaining some valuable experience that could even be added to a resume. It could also create beneficial connections between community members. Despite the program having limited spots available, it could still be a great asset to improving access to healthy food for a few more families in the neighbourhood.

3.2.2. Build a Market

Even though low-income communities tend to believe that farmers markets are "for the rich", more efforts should be put into the local farmer's market at Driftwood Community Centre. Most of the people interviewed mentioned the importance of keeping and developing this market. To many community members, it represents the best way to buy produce from the farm.

First, a clear communication and marketing strategy must be implemented. Partners should join in unity, as having only one vendor present is not very appealing to the community. FCF has started to participate in the markets but AFB did not have enough time this season. Other food vendors and local residents having food business should be invited to join the market as well.

A key for this market will be its animation. Different aspects should be encouraged such as live music (guitar, drums, etc.) and kids' activities (interactive educational boards, fruit and vegetable face painting). Food samples, such as for example a kale salad, could give community members the opportunity to taste something new and pique their curiosity as to what else is being offered. Distributing flyers with free recipes is also something that can make a difference. Finally, the market could also be a great opportunity for local artists to exhibit their work.

One issue that makes food at the market less accessible to the surrounding community is the presence of language barriers. With Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Arabic being the most spoken languages, translation is definitely needed for all of the vegetable and market vocabulary where it is missing. Toronto Public Health offered their translation services if needed, which makes matters simpler.

3.2.3. Develop a Farm Shop On-site

The partners need to find a way to sell produce grown at the farm at wholesale pricing to the entire community, and still maintain financial stability. This should not be too challenging, as significant savings from delivery, storage, and marketing could be made if the produce is actually sold within the community at the farm gate and comes from BCCF only. In the long-term, the farm store actually appears as the most appropriate and sustainable solution.

This could exist as an alternative to the mainstream stores, where the food is more affordable than a CSA program as there is no need to pay large amounts of money in advance and no commitment either. The farm store also forces people to come to the farm and perhaps eventually have a tour and meet the farmers thereby fostering the link between producers and consumers. It could even have the dimension of a small community store where people could find a wide range of hand-crafted jewellery, music paraphernalia, paintings and so on made by community member artists, and not only fruit and vegetables. This will give the store a strong community identity and offer all the more reason for residents to come and shop there.

The store could also be coupled with a community café, where community members that own their own food businesses such as catering companies or fresh juicing and smoothie-making could also be a part of the project.

3.2.4. Culturally Appropriate Food

Culturally appropriate and culturally recognizable food should also be a priority and grown much more on-site at BCCF or even in Hillsburgh (crops such as sweet corn, callaloo, okra, long beans, soy beans, etc.). This became apparent during the farmers' market, when many people were not buying because they did not recognize the vegetables being sold. Indeed, it makes sense to not buy a product that you do not know the taste of or the best way to prepare it. Residents



Figure 7 Callaloo



Figure 8 Okra

also sometimes came to see if we had one specific crop and were often disappointed as they were familiar with none of the crops or just a few that were being offered. There is enough land available on-site to grow the diversity required to meet the community's needs. Likewise, for crops that involve a larger scale such as sweet corn, they could be grown in Hillsburgh where there is more land available.

If, on one hand, the educational dimension of the project is meant to make people aware of basic seasonal food crops in the region, then so too on the other hand, the farm should offer culturally appropriate food crops that are an integral part to the everyday diet of community members.

3.2.5. Supporting the Local Economy

One could also play the card of supporting the local community's economy. Many customers that attended the market were more so buying vegetables to support their community than to "eat healthy" because of their hope that things could change and their belief that the farm is a great opportunity to remove the stigma that has been stuck onto the neighbourhood as well as give more credit and recognition to the youths involved in the project.

Initiatives must be taken at the City of Toronto level and guided by the Toronto Food Policy Council in order to implement a food stamps program to improve the access to healthy food in the different low-income areas of the city. This is done in the United States through a national program called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Carter and Brown 2003). Increasing the community's fresh food purchasing power thanks to a Food Stamps program would allow community members to more easily afford the food grown at BCCF and thereby participate in the development of the local economy. One thing that could set this program apart from other food stamp programs would be that the food coupons would allow in the acquiring of only fresh local food and could be used only at farmers' market or at urban agriculture businesses (no grocery stores). This can be done in Toronto as mentioned in Baker's (2003) research on farmers markets in low-income areas of the city.

The partners should also look more closely at local outlets for the produce such as restaurants or catering companies, shops, school cafeterias, and so on. A few community members were interested in buying considerable amounts of produce for their local business. A man named Oswald for example was willing to buy vegetables every week for his new catering business. Another man, Omar, who is a local food manufacturer with a serious amount of customers should be taken into consideration by the farm and given discounts if the supply to him is realized on a regular basis. This is a great opportunity for the farm to help generate profit within the community.

CHAPTER 4 - Discussion

This part is meant to consider the results obtained in a wider context, discussing the challenges that the project can face as well as the opportunities that such systems can offer to become a community development tool.

4.1. Urban agriculture as a community development tool

What urban agriculture brings to communities must go beyond the productive aspects of farming and offer an opportunity to build more sustainable socio-ecological environments. Community interactions can be fostered by local urban farming initiatives, though they are not an assured outcome. Using a participatory approach and being inclusive of the whole community in its diversity can facilitate new projects by providing equal opportunities to meet the needs of everyone.

There is a wide range of academic material available regarding the social benefits of farming in cities but urban agriculture can take many forms with differing dimensions and serve many purposes (Bellows et al. 2004; Duchemin et al. 2008; Nasr et al. 2010; Nettle 2010). The three most frequent forms in developed countries are: commercial farms, backyard gardens, and community gardens (Brown and Carter 2003). Most studies tend to focus on community or backyard gardening with no specific attention paid to larger-sized projects, as they are less common and a more recent trend. Indeed, urban commercial farms can only be found so far in the larger cities of North America such as for example New York, or Toronto (Duchemin et al. 2008).

The food system in industrialized countries is ill. People are more and more disconnected from the food they eat, especially in the ever-expanding urban areas. Therefore I have always thought that bringing farming to the city could help bridge this gap, offering new opportunities for future generations. Many commercial urban farming projects in our society can be considered elitist due to the fact that the organic food produced by them is costly and only reaches those who can afford it (Baker, 2003). Likewise, little emphasis has been put by these same projects to get low-income communities involved, raise their awareness about food, or provide them with fresh, healthy produce at an affordable price.

This particular study of the Black Creek Community Farm project can be situated in the wider and more general context of food deserts, which are becoming a regular occurrence in more and more cities, especially in North America (Duchemin et al. 2008). Food deserts are areas comprised of low-income-earning people who have dishearteningly low levels of access to fresh and healthy food because they are sectioned off and disconnected from the nourishing parts of the city's food system. Having an organic farm located in such an area of the city is therefore not commonplace, though the potential it could hold is huge: it could help improve food security and build communities. This is exactly why research based on this new experiment at BCCF could benefit other organizations that might face similar issues if they were willing to start a community farm in a similar context. Finally, it also has the potential to inspire other cities in supporting these types of urban farming projects that could act as social development tools within the communities.

4.2.Avoiding the “Business Trap”

“Healthy food is a right, not an option” (Amanda from The Stop).

Special attention should be paid so that BCCF does not fall into merely a business model and become an exploitative and profit-seeking-only capitalist venture. The commercial, business, and monetary aspects such as the desire to have a “working farm” (Dandy, 2013) where the sales of produce covers at least 50% of the farm's expenses, including the farmers' wage, must not interfere with the community building aspects. This focus on money has brought about the existence of a gap between community and partners, one that needs to be bridged. More direct communication is necessary between the two and the priority should be that community members feel welcome to the farm, integrated into the project. Everdale has to move beyond “tokenism” to make the community farm a reality. One cannot claim to improve access to food in a low-income community if charging the farmers themselves for the food they are growing.

This also brings the subsidies dilemma to the table. Focusing on money is normal when dealing with non-profit organizations as their continuation relies on funding and, in the case of BCCF, the farm might not necessarily be able to obtain subsidies forever in order to pay the farmers. However, profitability cannot be the priority and has to be seen as a long-term goal to reach, with farmers' wages being covered by grants in the short term. Brown and Carter (2003) are explaining that grants are needed for the initial stages of many urban agriculture projects that aim to be commercially viable. As a result, the beginning of such a community project should

have all energy going into involving the community in the project's process rather than thinking about money. Money will only come if the project is successful anyway, in this case meaning that the community has been sufficiently engaged.

In addition, partners disagree and have different points of view that are also interesting to explore. To sum up, Fresh City Farms is a for-profit organization which views subsidies as obstacles that are not self-sustaining whereas the three other non-profit organizations think of grants and subsidies as the only possible solution. Such diverging and different views could lead to fruitful results and assist in the community's capacity to achieve change. Even though experience shows (Baker 2003; Brown and Carter 2003; USDA 2009; The Stop; Growing Home) that subsidies are needed in order to make the food affordable to low-income communities, having a for-profit enterprise such as Fresh City Farms can give hope to community members who might consider farming as a career plan.

Finally, it is important that subsidies and grants raised for BCCF thanks to the neighbourhood being impoverished stay in the community and are not used for other Everdale's own ends in Hillsburgh. More accountability and transparency are needed.

4.3.Redefining Community Engagement

Even though the desire of socializing is often not the primary reason for a community member to get involved in an urban agricultural adventure, the occurrence of these particular human interactions have become a real tool useful in fostering communities and developing social networks that strengthen the whole social environment and contribute to the durability of the project within the community (Duchemin et al. 2008). This is only the first year of the BCCF project so it is normal, based on other urban farming experiences of working within low-income communities, that it will take time to raise awareness in the community with patience being a much needed priority. It is difficult to build leadership in any community over only one season, it has to progress and grow over time.

Since its inception, BCCF was created as a trial project to engage the community in the Black Creek area. Everdale took on this project and wisely gathered many partners and subsidies along the way in order to bring it to life. Although the project looks promising at surface-level and exists as a winning situation for all of the partners, the fact of the matter is that one must dig deeper to realize that community involvement has not been the number one priority at BCCF for the first season. An agroecologist understands, however, that you cannot have a sustainable

system without support from the surrounding environment, i.e. the surrounding community. A useful metaphor would be planting a tomato plant in a garden that is not yours and hoping that it yields the most beautiful tomatoes when the gardener is not given an opportunity to tend for it. The tomatoes would undoubtedly be sub-par. Engaging the community in the system and building connections therefore must be the priority from the beginning.

If the first vision of the farm is to create a “natural space open to people”, then there should be no barriers existing in the creation of this for both human and worldly dimensions. The project can be a success in terms of materials and economics but it will never be a full success if the social dimension is left out. The number one issue at BCCF is therefore the autocratic control that its management (Everdale) has over the project and the lack of control that community members have to land and resources. This is not a problem in Everdale’s country farm in Hillsburgh because it is located on rented property, but it is in the heart of the city because this land does not belong to them, being government-owned, and being the best farmland that exists in the Black Creek area for community members to farm on. With acres and acres to farm in Hillsburgh, it is hard to validate Everdale’s autocratic control of BCCF when it is located on the only farmable land in Toronto’s most impoverished neighbourhoods, and when the organization does not even allow community members to farm there or grow food. This kind of behaviour comes from the management of a farm that is supposed to be *for* the community, it would be a shame if it was just a façade to maintain itself to receive funding and subsidies.

Community engagement is therefore integral to the success of a community farm. The visioning session has so far confirmed this sentiment as community members agree. From the beginning Everdale has been the driving force of the BCCF project, and made a wise strategic move to gather other agencies around the table, each fulfilling a specific role. However, it is always difficult to engage a community as an organization coming from outside of the community, unfamiliar with the lived experiences of the people there. It therefore was extremely relevant and of practical importance to establish community engagement through the visioning session. Regardless of the form that the urban farming project ends up taking, experience has shown that a participatory approach is needed in order to invest in social capital. Community farming initiatives should be based on a federated bottom-up vision that gives priority to local needs (Cerezuelle & Roustang 1997; Koc et al. 1999; Kearney 2009). Community engagement should stimulate and prepare the community to nurture and sustain the project. It includes having community members exercising their right in every aspect of the farm: planning and planting, tending to the plants, harvesting, and selling produce at an affordable price. So far, community

members have expressed their willingness to participate (workshops, tours, volunteering) but have more so been pushed to the sidelines as observers. The BCCF partners should be aware that the community, even though not directly engaged, still has the ability to affect the project. Such a farm should therefore be structured on mutual respect and understanding.

The farm also has to work as a single unit, as any successful farm should. All the partners must be involved in community engagement. As an example, FCF is only farming a plot of one acre so far, without interacting much with the community. Implementing their member farmer program in the community as explained in the recommendations would be a great opportunity to help BCCF achieve long-term community engagement. FoodShare also has an important role to play in the coming seasons with their community-composting program, which is meant to involve all residents; even ones that are not buying vegetables from the farm could participate in the cycling of nutrients at a neighbourhood scale.

Finally, the arguments used to sell the produce should not only be related to improving health but also about the priceless social connections and relationships built as well as the support for a local economy. At the Driftwood Farmers' market, many people were buying just to support the youths working in the field, not because they are their siblings, but because they believe in the power of community. The BCCF site is not only about farming; it is eight acres of land where wildlife thrives (Appendix 6), a unique natural area within a city neighbourhood that must be promoted and shared with all residents.

4.4.BCCF Relationships

The communication between the partners and within the main farm staff has to be improved otherwise there will be negative consequences for community engagement.

A goal that Everdale's decision makers and steering committee should set is to tread carefully and make absolute sure that racism and power relationship issues that could occur are discussed and prevented. This is especially important for this project because it is run with a top-down approach rather than bottom-up, and its leaders are Caucasians from the countryside coming into an urban and underprivileged diverse community. For example, the youth coordinator was told to target youths from grade 11 to 12 (16 to 18 year old), which is a bit narrow to run any efficient community youth engagement. Initiatives with younger kids had to be aborted. This is not a bottom-up-centred approach.

Considering productivity too much makes it hard to avoid power relationships and it becomes easier to forget the key social aspects that are necessary for the durability of the project. This whole picture can be compared to a situation that occurs on a regular basis in our society, but on a larger scale. A large company (such as an oil, gas, or gold extracting company) goes into a territory that does not belong to them and uses up the area's most valuable natural assets that is the very sustenance of the surrounding community and then pats themselves on the back for giving the local natives some jobs. All the while they are funded and subsidized by other organizations to do so because of the common belief that they are helping the locals. Well, the locals could be better helped either through direct engagement or being left to their own resources.

Making matters worse is the racial tensions growing at BCCF due to the hierarchal model that exists there between management (mostly middle-aged Caucasians) and workers/community members (culturally diverse) and also within the workers' team, as they do not get the chance to receive cross-cultural training. If the farm is truly about engaging the locals, then this kind of hierarchy must be addressed and demolished with a system of equal opportunity built in its place. All staff should receive an equal wage and an equal amount of duties. There should be no wage differences within the hired staff that has similar responsibilities on the farm even though they were not paid the same. The distribution of duties also seemed sometimes unfair, as some farmers were dedicated to office work while others were always outside in the field. These examples can lead to social division, which means failure for such a project. In order to have an efficient working community farm, there must be a fair management frame with more transparency and no differences between how individuals are treated, regardless of sex, race, or origins. At the end of the season one important first step that was taken to address this issue was an anti-racism session put in place by York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies and FoodShare for community members and BCCF staff.

Empathy should be cultivated. Listening to each other, sharing in the power of decision-making, celebrating differences, and developing leadership opportunities for underrepresented groups are only some of the strategies that can be used to create successful team energy for a community farm. Following-up is what matters for the community that comes to work; people cannot be used one year and then dropped the next. BCCF must care about the future of the staff they hired from one year to the next. They cannot exist as only temporary labour as they are oftentimes worried about what is coming next. Farmers and farm interns should be able to obtain the skills they require to eventually start their own farming business when they leave the farm.

4.5.Challenges of the Participatory Approach

Conducting a successful participatory research is not an easy task. Being a solitary foreign student dealing with a real life complex situation abroad and facing social and cross-cultural issues, as well as getting acquainted with the neighbourhood (streets, key people, and local organizations) was challenging. Time was crucial. As a single external researcher, it was very difficult to grasp the big picture of the situation from the very beginning. In order to conduct a successful participatory research, one has to be immersed in the system studied. Even over a period of six months this is extremely challenging. If being external to the project was key in building trust with the community, it was also a hardship, as it requires more time and effort to understand the internal conflicts and different roles of those involved as well as the political dimension that exists.

Unfortunately this research has not been able to include data from local schools as the interviews were mostly conducted during the summer school holidays. This would have been of value to explore, especially because schools could represent potential customers and buy considerable amounts of BCCF production on a regular basis. Nevertheless, I was able to gather information related to school partnerships for education and it seems like one of the long-term visions of FoodShare is to involve schools from the neighbourhood and eventually the entire city in environmental stewardship and farm training programs that would occur at BCCF, taking advantage of the uniqueness of having such a farm within city limits and bringing a new dimension to kids' education.

Using the series of workshops to conduct the visioning session was helpful by building on previous relationships with community members; it was key in having a successful visioning session and gathering as many motivated people from the community as possible. Indeed, it would have been more difficult to run an isolated visioning workshop as it seems like the community needed to be acquainted with the place and feel comfortable with the staff first in order to “free their mind” and share their thoughts. The diversity of ages and cultures within the workshop was an incredible asset to the experience for all who were present. People felt comfortable to bring their children and that gave the atmosphere a vibrant sense of very real community. Everyone enjoyed the shared meals and it is worth noting the very wise words that “good food must be present to have good conversations about food issues” (Damian Adjodha).

The workshops have definitely had a snowball effect with the first workshop, entitled “Feeding Yourself by Creating Ecosystems”, taking place in May and gathering only four

people. One month later, the fourth workshop for the visioning session was a great success with fifteen people from the community showing up. Contrary to dealing with students or politicians, community members all have different schedules, and as a result people arrived sparingly with dinner served in order to kill some time before the crowd gathered. It was important for the community to understand that the whole process was designed in order to serve their interests, as research can sometimes scare people because they feel that they are used and that it will not help them change their situation.

Finally, I will forever remember an old Chilean lady from the seniors' group at the Driftwood Community Centre who has never met a French person before and was happy to share her thoughts with me, even though her English was poor. Fortunately, the person in charge of the seniors' wellbeing was helping with a Spanish translation for those who needed it. Overall, what stroke me from meeting with community members, either during official meetings or through more casual conversation at the market and at farm events, was the hope that people had. People were happy to hear and see something great happening in their neighbourhood, giving opportunity for the community to get rid of the bad stigma associated with the area.

4.6. Is it possible in European Cities?

The largest issue of such a project in European cities would be its scale. Given the fact that the cities are much smaller (with for example Toronto's surface area being six times larger than Paris) and more densely populated, making access to land for farming on a large scale more difficult. However, in Europe, such projects could eventually take place in the outskirts of the cities where there are usually more vacant lots and a higher concentration of low-income communities (Sureau 2012).

European cities can face similar issues as the Black Creek community, for example some studies have shown the existence of food deserts in the United Kingdom (Wrigley 2002). Even though there is no evidence of the existence of such food deserts in France, obesity has been increasing since the 1980's and is directly correlated to unhealthy diets, a trend comparable to the one occurring in North America and in the United States in particular (Brown and Carter 2003; Saint Pol 2010).

If we look at the map of the community gardens in Paris, it is remarkable to note that they are all clustered in districts where low-income communities live. Gardening and growing fresh food is therefore something that those communities desire. That is why there could be a potential

to develop an urban agriculture project similar to BCCF in those neighbourhoods. It could have a more structured frame and engage communities on a larger-scaled farming project. People will not only gather on Sundays to garden and have a picnic as they already do, but could also grow food to sell and create a business—this is the dimension missing when compared to North America.

A change is slowly occurring already. We see for example in the outskirt of Lyon, some new projects emerging such as “La Marmite urbaine”, a local association inspired by Canadian community projects, that sells, delivers and offers organic meals cooked with fresh local produce at affordable prices to the local community. Their wish is to make healthy organic fresh food accessible for all, even those who have a tight budget (“healthy food must be a standard”). As their project is in development, they are now in looking for opportunities to grow part of their produce in the city, in community housing parks or even on rooftops.

4.7. Another Social Dimension to Urban Agriculture

This six-month experience of working at Fresh City Farms and getting involved in the exciting new project that is the Black Creek Community Farm, made me realize a whole new dimension to urban farming that deserves more attention from researchers. Even though people might falsely believe that farming in the city could bring more competition with local farmers (Cerezuelle & Roustang 1997) and thus kill rural life even more rendering it even less attractive, I noticed during my Torontonion experience as an urban grower that urban agriculture could paradoxically lead to a completely opposite end. Indeed, the key element in keeping a strong farmers’ network in the countryside is to make farming a desirable career for today’s youth (de la Salle and Holland 2010). Thanks to urban farming projects and their educational dimension, which showcase a career or an alternative path, urban dwellers with no farming background can discover something new, and delve further into something they like, giving more meaning to their grey city lives. It is not only the youth that are engaged, but also elders can become more dedicated to their job, their way of life, and slowly move from a 1000 square foot plot in the city to a farm in the countryside, therefore revitalizing the rural areas that the farmers’ children and kin tended to leave, being attracted by the too idealized city life. This is a personal statement but I am convinced that there is, through the farming of cities, a huge potential to not only trigger a countryside repopulation but also to strengthen the local food system, saving regional traditions and offering people the opportunity to have a healthier lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Utilizing Soft Systems Methodology proved useful when dealing with the complex and many socio-cultural dimensions that exist within the Black Creek community. A participatory approach was also required given the current top-down approach used at this community farm.

I first arrived in Toronto with very little knowledge of the situation at Black Creek Community Farm, and certainly no idea as to how it may achieve its future goals. After meeting with key people interested or involved in the project as well as getting acquainted with the community members, I noticed the interest and concern the community seemed to hold in regards to the future development of the farm in the neighbourhood. There are enormous resources available inside and outside of the community to create a change and improve access to healthy food in the area.

So far BCCF did not create access to healthy food in the Black Creek community due to the marketing strategies used not being appropriate, and also because it was only the project's first season and awareness in the community was only beginning to rise. As stated previously, awareness and access to healthy food are processes that take time.

Nettle (2010) concludes that community gardens are “not only producers of food, community and culture but also generators of hope, possibility and collective imagination”. The same statement could be made in the case of the community farm at Black Creek, as it is a project that is giving hope to this marginalized community, as they are given an opportunity to partake in this unique project that exists in Toronto. I hope the work accomplished in this paper will act as a catalyst for BCCF's success in terms of food access and community engagement.

It will also undoubtedly be interesting to see the results of the Health Impact Assessment report, which has been created in order to measure the extent of which such urban farming projects can achieve their objectives of building healthier communities through the development of healthy food access. This report is valuable for the collection of quantitative data, which will illustrate the efficiency of such projects and how much they really benefit the communities involved.

When looking at the wider context of food deserts and their existence in industrialized countries, an urban farming project similar to BCCF, with the intention of becoming financially sustainable and building a long-term community structure in a low-income area, must have the

various partners and groups involved working together at any cost to support the community in reaching its fullest capabilities. Programs must be set in place to involve the community in the system, with everyone working together toward a common goal, in turn creating a more just, classless food system and fostering social development.

Engaging the community on every level is a necessary step to improving access to healthy food. Self-sufficiency and a lack of dependence on local grocery stores (which are part of the many acclaimed food deserts) is one way in which people can grow and consume their very own healthy food. Large-scale urban farming projects should therefore look at giving the local community a space to grow food or more labour opportunities in exchange for produce. Since large-scale urban farming projects (such as BCCF) rent land that does not belong to them and most often the most fertile land existing in such communities, they in turn should make every effort to incorporate the community voice into their governing body. A resilient local food system is a closed food system where food flows through the community at every step and where no outside food is necessary. More local labour results in local production. This requires less transportation of produce from other farms and is therefore more sustainable.

Engaging low-income communities means speaking the language of the locals, literally and metaphorically. Outreach should come in many forms and be found at various neighbourhood "safe" spots and be made available in a variety of languages.

Food is a sacred universal tool that brings people together. Organizing free events and food growing or knowledge sharing workshops among cultures and generations with local produce sampled is one sure way to attract attention and meet the right people. Teaching people how to farm their own space at home or in the garden by giving them an opportunity to labour for produce is a great way to both educate and share with community members as well. The point (often overlooked) is that people love being outside among the plants and critters and simply giving them an opportunity to do so is all that is needed sometimes.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 List of respondents and interview guidelines

- 1) **Black Creek Community members:** *community organizations such as the Early Years Centre, Driftwood Community Centre Seniors, Jane and Finch Family Centre and “The Spot” youth association, volunteers met on the farm, customers at the Driftwood Farmers’ market, residents who came to the workshops or to the Grand Opening community events.*

Quick introduction to the Black Creek Community Farm project, presenting Everdale, the partners, and their vision.

- What is your first impression about the project?
- What would you like to see happening? Is there anything that could be done to make it more appealing/attractive? What is important to you?
- How would you like to be involved? How will you participate? How do you see your role?

- 2) **Black Creek Community Farm stakeholders:** *Everdale: Gavin Dandy, Wally Seccombe from Everdale’s Board and some of the farm staff such as: Alvis, Collins, Alex, Malika, Emily, Phillip Liwei (youth coordinator), Jacqueline Dwyer and Leticia Boahen (community agents); Ran Goel and Phillip Collins (founders of FCF), Ann Lololi (executive director of AFB), Utcha Sawyers (FoodShare), Damian Adjodha (York University researcher).*

- What is your role? What is important to you?
- What is your opinion/first impression on the project?
- How do you think that the community needs this farm? Why do you think it is needed? Is there anything that could be done to make it more appealing?
- What will success look like to you in 1 year/5 years (long versus short term)?
- What is the best way to reach community members most in need?
- How would you identify community “champions” or “leaders”?
- How do you see the community’s involvement and their desires?

- 3) **Public institutions/Policy makers:** *Solomon Boyé (Parks and Recreation division of the city), Joe Nasr (Toronto Food Policy Council), Lauren Baker (Toronto Public Health)*

- How do you perceive such projects? How would you get people involved?
- Have you ever heard of similar projects?
- What do you think is the best model to offer food to low income populations?
- Do you think such projects can help offer a better future for food justice in deprived communities?

- 4) **Other organizations:** *Amanda Montgomery (“The Stop” Community Food Centre), Harry Rhodes (Growing Home Chicago)*

- What is your mission?
- What is your experience with access to food for low-income communities?
- How did you proceed to overcome those issues?
- How does the low-income aspect affect the overall operation?
- What do you think is the best model to sell/offer access to organic food that you grow?

1. Quick presentation of the purpose and desired outcomes of the workshop (What is your purpose here tonight? Tonight is about throwing seeds Evaluate yourself/potential what you need/have to give...), explaining agroecology, highlighting ground breaking world agroecosystems like the story of Cuba, expressing partners' 2012 vision and showing the rich picture while having the diner served.
2. Create the space for the visioning:

Everyone should close his or her eyes, "It is a nice day of the summer 2050, you are walking on Jane Street and then entering to the farm..."

Prompting questions: What can you see? What do you do there? What is flowing from BCCF? How does the community grow?
3. Participants describe and write down what they have seen on post-its that are then collected.
4. Plenary – sharing of the thoughts out loud.
5. Identification of key values.
6. Group of people working on posters for each value.
7. Each group presents the ideas they developed.
8. Conclusion.



Appendix 3 Workshops series

Workshop 1: Agroecology: Natural Gardening philosophy, design, and skills training
“Feeding yourself by creating ecosystems”.

Workshop 2: Agroecological Family Nutrition Sovereignty System Design:
“Growing your family’s Vitamins, Minerals and Medicine”.

Workshop 3: *New World Gardens*: Plant and Human migrations transplanting culture
“World farmers growing World crops in the GTA”.

Workshop 4: Agroecological Community Food Production Systems:
“Collective Strategies for Community Food Sovereignty”.

Workshop 5: Agroecology, The Ancestral Art of Sustainability:
“Telling Stories of Our Co-Evolution with our Environment, Plants & Animals”.

Appendix 4 Draft map of the site



Appendix 5 Potential people for a community board (people who came regularly to the farm and show real interest in changing things)

1. Noel Livingston, Urban Farmer, Community Worker, Chef, Artist, Lifestyle Living Coach - Resident of Toronto.
2. Jacqueline Dwyer, Urban Farmer, Community Worker, Community Organizer, business owner, mother, staff at BCCF - Resident of Toronto.
3. Stephanie Henry, Food Coop owner, Student, Mother, Community Worker - Resident of Finch & Sentinel.
4. Damian Adjodha, Farmer, Masters Student at York University, Finished a one year contract with Everdale in June – Resident of Toronto.
5. Charlyn Ellis, FoodShare staff, works at BCCF also for FoodShare, local journalist, Mother, Gardner, Community Organizer - Resident of Toronto.
6. Juma, Chef, Member of Afri-can Food Basket, Community Worker & Organizer - Resident of Toronto & Trinidad.
7. Alvis Julien, Former Banker, Farmer at BCCF, Student, Community Organizer, Chef – lives near Jane and Finch area.
8. Ancient, Farmer, Chef, Artiste, Father - Resident of Jane & Finch.
9. Wayne, Chef, Farmer, Father, Resident of Jane & Finch.
10. Antonio, Masters student at York University, Farmer, business owner - Resident of Richmond Hill.
11. Nijen, Volunteer at BCCF, Father – New Canadian just arrived in Toronto last year.
12. Emmanuel Adekolu, wants to become a future farmer - lives in the Jane & Finch Community.
13. Samari, High School student, lives in Jane Finch Community.

Appendix 4 List of wildlife spotted on-site during the season

Raccoons (*Procyon Lotor*)



Eastern Gray Squirrels (*Sciurus Carolinensis*)



Black Squirrels (*Sciurus Carolinensis*)



Groundhogs (*Marmota Monax*)



Least Weasels (*Mustela Nivalis*)



Fisher (*Martes Pennanti*)



Common Snapping Turtles (*Chelydra
Serpentina*)



White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus Virginianus*)



Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo Jamaicensis*)



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea Herodias*)

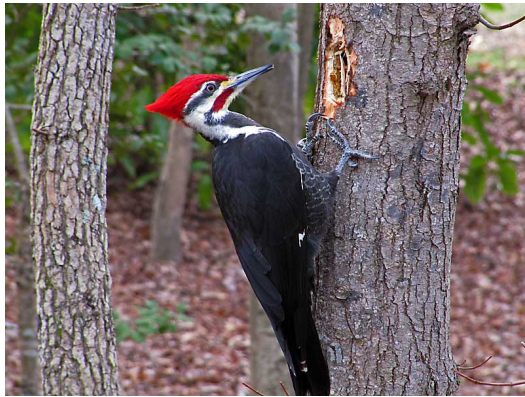


Garter Snakes (*Thamnophis*)



Both Downy (*Picoides Pubescens*)



Pileated Woodpeckers (*Dryocopus Pileatus*)Barred Owl (*Strix Varia*)

There were also the more common birds like: American Robins (*Turdus Migratorius*), Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta Cristata*), Cardinals (*Cardinalidae family*), New World Orioles (*Icterus family*), many Sparrows (*Passeridae family*), True Finches (*Fringillidae family*), and Common Grackles (*Quiscalus Quiscula*).