

# RIG YOUR FIT-OUT:

AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF  
FOOD POLICY LEVERS  
FOR THE CITY-REGION  
OF ST. JOHN'S

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**Rig Your Fit-Out: An Environmental Scan of Food Policy Levers for the City-Region of St. John's**  
**FINAL REPORT**

From the Dictionary of NL English (NL Heritage web site):

**rig** v also ~ **out**, ~ **up**. *OED* ~ v<sup>2</sup> 6, 6 b for sense 1; cp *OED* 3 for sense 2. See FIT: *fit out*.

1 To prepare, equip, put into order (something); esp **to improvise in an impromptu or ingenious manner**.

**fit-out** n [phonetics unavailable]. *OED* fit sb<sup>4</sup> (1836, 1844), *DAE* (1840-), *DC* 1, 2 (1829-; 1955) for senses 1, 3. See also FIT: *fit out*, RIG n.

5 A technical device for a specified purpose; contraption; MACHINE.

**P 148-60 ~ A term applied to any object or instrument, when proper name is unknown or too burdensome [to use].** T 26-64<sup>3</sup> [The brigs] used to have yards across them, see. They had the same kind of a fit-out, but they had yards besides up the topsail. T 92/3-64 Then when this got worked, they'd have to get their fit-out an' runned it off—moonshine.

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## **2. GLOSSARY**

Food policy: The distribution of resources and opportunities in society that define how food is produced, distributed, and consumed; and what governments can and should do about it.

Food policy levers: Existing or potential policy instruments that have an influence on food production, distribution, or consumption. The use of the term levers in this report implies a degree of agency among policy actors, who can change or adapt the structural context to achieve desired outcomes.

Food environment: The accessibility, availability, and affordability of food in a community or region. This is a term that is particularly salient to the public health literature and is sometimes referred to as a nutrition environment.

Food planning: Designing for healthy and sustainable food systems, and equitable retail food access, when planning communities.

### **3. INTRODUCTION**

#### **3.1 Background and rationale**

##### ***Where does food fit in city-regions?***

No order of government in Canada has complete authority over 'food' per se. City-regions have traditionally been regarded as 'downstream' policy actors in food systems when compared to federal and provincial governments, and the private sector. As such, policy that governs food access for residents in city-regions is usually a complex tangle of jurisdictional authorities.

For instance, retail food stores now represent the dominant setting for people to access food in city-regions worldwide. Over 70 cents of every food dollar in Canada is spent in a retail store. When people shop for food at a supermarket or convenience store in a city-region, their access to that food is shaped by a myriad of variables operating at the community level including: specific municipal policy instruments related to operation of licensed food premises; unintended consequences of non-food focused local policy goals, such as traffic control or parking; short- and long term outcomes of development planning that defines service access and how commercial retail businesses should be situated as part of neighbourhood composition; the downstream enforcement of provincial legislation; and the influence of increasingly large players in the private sector, such as large grocers, whose supplier networks and retail outlet placement in neighbourhoods represent commercial aims defined to meet national or transnational interests.

Within this policy mix, it has often been accepted that city-regions' role is primarily to interpret and enforce food legislation. For example, at a minimum, cities might deal with premises licensing and waste disposal. Yet even a policy instrument such as routine licensing arrangements can present unpredictable barriers to market entry for new or novel food businesses, and have a range of intended and unintended effects in establishing consumption spaces for the public.

It is within this context that social movements and changes in governance structures influencing municipalities over the last few decades have begun to clarify and expand the idea of what cities can do about food.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, many of these developments have been nested in the idea of how municipalities can shape the health of their residents.

The current revival of city-region food policy thinking can trace its lineage several decades. The postwar expansion of the welfare state and the spread of rights-based social justice movements in expanding policy instruments were countered by the worldwide energy crisis and forces of public sector retrenchment in the 1970s and 1980s. Amid this, cities were hotbeds of action on growing social inequity. Food security and the right to food received growing attention in the municipal policy conversation, aligned with the broader Healthy Cities movement associated with the World Health Organization population health agenda, including the 1986 Ottawa Charter on Health Promotion.<sup>2</sup>

Toronto founded the first municipal food policy council in Canada in 1991, the second oldest in North America.<sup>3</sup> The Toronto Food Policy Council was a subcommittee to the local Board of Health intended to advise on food issues for the municipality. More broadly, it was an

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intersectoral citizen group with a direct linkage to municipal government actors, which could then play a strategic role in establishing priorities and parameters for how the city could support—or be a hindrance to—equitable food access for all city residents. The establishment of the council also served as a platform to bring together diverse stakeholders at work in and around the city-region to synthesize evidence on and advocate for a progressive policy context for local food systems to thrive.

Early work on municipal food policy developments were rooted in a social commentary on urbanization and the wellbeing of city populations. More recently a broader policy discussion has incorporated a regional governance lens, and considered the wide variety of food system issues that differently sized and situated municipalities face; for example, the relationship between central metros and their periphery municipalities. Urban and regional planners, and other scholars, have increasingly discussed how *city-regions* are the appropriate geographic scale at which to consider food access and food environments issues for municipalities. The city-region level of aggregation is the frame for this report.

### ***The city-region of St. John's***

There are many approaches to define the relevant target populations for food policy levers, from administratively defined jurisdictions to functional definitions. This report aims to align with other Harris Centre scholarship on defining *functional regions* grounded in specific social and economic activities such as labour markets.<sup>14</sup>

One of main objectives of this study was to initiate an analysis towards a meaningful functional definition of the city-region of St. John's for food policy, based on the blend of policy levers that operates in this city-region space.

The city-region of St. John's is an important example to examine within the broader Canadian literature on food environments and health, and food policy for city-regions. Many city-region food policy initiatives worldwide, including food policy councils, food business incubators, urban food strategies, and other activities described later in this report, have been designed for larger municipalities such as New York, London (UK), Seattle; Toronto, Vancouver, and Edmonton. Some food policy initiatives have also focused explicitly at the regional level, such as work on the Greater Golden Horseshoe in Ontario; however, these still take on peripheral municipality development at a much higher population level and population density.

As the 48<sup>th</sup> largest city (St. John's) and the 20<sup>th</sup> largest CMA (St. John's Metro) in Canada, a study of St. John's city-region is valuable for highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities for smaller urban communities. This study also aims to build upon the evidence base about how to address transferability of food policy and food system innovations from larger municipal centres.

### ***Food policy and health***

This report approaches food policy and food systems from a population health and broad health promotion perspective (see also the Glossary). Taking a population health approach to look at food means analyzing food access, food policy, and food system governance on the basis of how public policy determines the distribution of resources in a society and establishes the structural context for the choices of both corporations and consumers,<sup>4-6</sup> which define the resources and

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opportunities available to individuals and populations to achieve a state of health. In other words, this analysis examines how opportunities for health are inequitably distributed within and among populations,<sup>7</sup> and how public policy levers might be used to reorganize those opportunities more fairly in societies.

In addition, while food systems and population health are both part of broader ecological systems, a separate literature examines global food policy within a sustainable agroecology,<sup>8</sup> and this is beyond the scope of the report here. This report takes as its unit of analysis the municipal government-market-consumer nexus, looking social relations inside and between governments, how the market and policy structure works for specific types of food businesses, and how consumers behave in response to their local food environments.

Finally, because this report addresses population health, it also considers policy levers as critical to operationalizing public health aims. Global consensus is clear that health, including quality diets and access to nutritious food cannot be achieved by good individual decisions alone: policy and environmental supports are essential to promote healthier diets and reduce the burden of noncommunicable diseases and obesity.<sup>9-14</sup>

### ***Small-and-medium sized enterprises (SMEs)***

To orient this environmental scan, we focused on gathering empirical data from a specific subset of small-and-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) who conduct economic activities within the St. John's city-region, namely, small retail food firms including restaurants, retail stores, and primary food producers who also participate in direct sales to consumers.

Retail SMEs are of economic importance.<sup>15,16</sup> Retail is the single largest small business subsector,<sup>17</sup> and retailers comprise approximately one-third of the membership of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, a key voice for small business. In 2012, the combined operating revenue for retail food outlets such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and gas stations made up nearly 35% of the retail trade in Canada.<sup>18</sup> The retail sector is a dynamic, competitive, and challenging part of contemporary food systems with an important relationship to population health.<sup>19-22</sup>

Our aim is to improve our understanding of how the policy environment affects these retail SMEs, but we are also interested in interventions: how city-regions can best leverage this important economic asset at the community level in accomplishing population health aims.

Despite their importance to economies, small retail food firms are rarely studied in the public health policy literature, which tends to focus on how large, multinational commercial forces are detrimental to people's diets. However, small retail food firms are very important to understand from a local health promotion perspective and therefore should be a core part of how city-regions operationalize food and health. Small food businesses, particularly in smaller city-regions, can play an outsized role in setting social norms in smaller communities and local food economies. Small retail stores have been lauded for fostering social connections, offering specialized goods and services tailored to local markets, and creating value for consumers, particularly underserved populations.<sup>23,24</sup> This report thus begins to explore the potential dual role for such small

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enterprises in health promotion: a place to strengthen local economies and social networks,<sup>16</sup> and a locally influential consumer environment that could be leveraged to promote healthier diets.<sup>25-27</sup>

Finally, SMEs are particularly important to understand in a jurisdiction where many of the policy levers for food are oriented towards a primarily export-oriented and globalized food economy, which is the case in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Such policy levers may be particularly burdensome to SMEs,<sup>28-30</sup> and municipalities can be cognizant of how they could use their local authority to mitigate some of these barriers in their direct relationships with local businesses.

### **3.2 Research methods**

This research comprises primary review of grey literature documents and an empirical component comprised of interviews with key informants relevant to the policy area under study.

#### ***Grey literature review***

Grey literature from entrepreneur-oriented policy documents, including reports and guidance prepared by the City of St. John's, provincial government departments, and other public and private sector agency websites holding grey literature of relevance to the project, particularly Municipalities NL and the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development.

We were interested in an array of policy portfolios with an influence on retail food businesses in the city-region. Over the time period of the research a number of the provincial ministries have been renamed. Broadly, we accessed document sources from provincial government departments, agencies, and municipal governments including: health (including health and community services as well as health promotion under the seniors, wellness, and social development portfolio); environmental health and licensing through Service NL; business and rural development; environment and conservation; public engagement; Policy NL; fisheries and aquaculture; transportation and works; BizPal; Eastern Health; City of St. John's; City of Mount Pearl; Food First NL; and the St. John's Farmer's Market. We reviewed several synthesis documents of levers produced for local purposes such as the St. John's Farmer's Market *Vendor Handbook* (updated annually) and the City of St. John's *Operating a Business in the City of St. John's: A Guide to Municipal Regulations*.

#### ***Key informant interviews***

We recruited participants through purposive sampling from known city-region food policy networks in the St. John's city-region. The principal inclusion criterion was ownership of a for-profit private sector retail food small business in St. John's. We sought representation of perspectives from entrepreneurs from three small business types: retail stores; foodservices including restaurants; and primary agricultural producers engaged in direct marketing of their products to consumers. We included both bricks-and-mortar businesses as well as those who engage in other forms of retailing. We considered 'farm gate' operations as well as collective retail settings such as farmers' markets and other forms of 'incubation' of new food businesses. This study therefore also considers a range of food products, from individual products of primary agricultural production with no or minimal processing such as vegetables, to products of value-added processing, whether prepared in a foodservices/hospitality setting or through various forms of manufacture or secondary processing. For all interviews, we focused on the interface between the government, these businesses, and consumers, what we defined broadly as the 'retailing'

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activities. This was not a representative sample and we did not conduct analysis to elaborate on the differences in policy experience among these three groups.

In addition, we interviewed individuals who could comment first-hand on public policy processes and instruments, including both municipal and provincial government staff.

For all informants—both entrepreneurs and actors within government—we were interested in their everyday work with food and the food system, how they solved practical problems, their interpretation of how they did so successfully (or not) within the local policy environment, their ideas about food businesses and health, broadly defined, and the opportunities and constraints they encountered with promoting health in their business model.

We expected that our sample would include individuals from the following researcher-defined social groups: community leaders with formal cultural or political roles; informal 'opinion/thought leaders'; public health practitioners; government staff; and small business owners.

We conducted interviews with n=17 key informants. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 19-70 minutes (average 52 minutes) were conducted in-person, except one interview that was conducted by telephone due to inclement weather. All interviews were audio recorded with written informed consent and transcribed verbatim.

Participants included: small retail food business owners (8), community leaders (2), a politician on municipal council (1), municipal government planning staff members (3), provincial government staff members from health and business departments (2), and a business association director (1).

Transcripts were cleaned against the raw data. One team member coded transcripts initially using qualitative analysis software, applying a directed content analysis approach,<sup>31</sup> where an initial list of concepts based on the entrepreneur theories discussed above were used (deductive analysis), with additions and refinements based on observations from the data (inductive analysis), in order to capture theoretically significant as well as emergent themes.<sup>32</sup>

Transcripts were also reviewed by two coders in relation to the grey literature compiled, to compile a list of policy levers relevant to small food businesses identified by key informants, organized by theme, provincial and municipal government contact persons associated with interpreting each policy instrument for further outreach, potential partnerships, knowledge exchange, and consultation in a professional capacity. Policy levers identified encompassed: statutes and regulations; municipal bylaws; licenses and permits required for operating businesses (usually associated with particular statutes/regulations/bylaws); position papers; policy guidance (i.e., guides for interpretation of policy published for different audiences such as entrepreneurs); tax instruments such as exemptions and business-specific levies; policy frameworks (e.g., the provincial *Eating Healthier in Newfoundland and Labrador: Provincial Food and Nutrition Framework and Action Plan*, 2006 which provides a structural context for program activities carried out by provincial government.

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Coded transcripts/written summaries of themes were read and deliberated upon by four team members. Quotations used in this report have been de-identified with numerical references. We removed the “you know” discourse marker (all other discourse markers, such as “like”, were retained) and repeated words “a, a”, for clarity of reading.

Final themes were debriefed by two team members (CM and NT) who led the writing of this report.

An additional group of stakeholders (n=15) were not invited to take part in an interview, but were rather consulted in a professional capacity. Over the course of the project, these conversations were used to flesh out or contextualize emergent themes, establish relationships for future knowledge mobilization, and to seek access to documents or inquire about administrative data.

### **3.3 Clearances**

This project was reviewed for institutional ethics board approval by the Heath Research Ethics Board and received full approval on August 15, 2015 as protocol #14.174 (MAH). The protocol received an annual renewal in 2015 and 2016. An ethics closeout will be sought upon completion of final and financial reporting.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 The city-region role in food policy and planning**

Food is not currently a city-region priority for St. John's. Food policy and planning is primarily carried out on an ad hoc basis in the city-region. Although there were several indications that food initiatives are increasingly on the radar for businesses and government officials, this was often as a result of the initiative of individuals who are interested in food as a personal or professional priority.

This does not mean that policy developments have occurred without food system objectives in mind. Rather, what became evident through this research is that when food initiatives have been pursued, such as the development of the new permanent location for the farmers' market, that those involved may still see the success of such initiatives as a function of the market economy or community support, rather than as a matter of policy design with food in mind.

One municipal government informant observed, with regard to different policy instruments that the municipality could use to improve food access in particular neighbourhoods, *"I don't think the City is able to get into subsidizing businesses anymore so we have to leave it up to the free market system unfortunately in some cases."* [2-8]

It is worth mentioning that this view is not unusual for many municipalities in Canada and globally who are just beginning the conversation on cities and the food system.

However, in light of the growing momentum for city-regions worldwide to take on food policy as a tool for city-building, this would seem to be a vast untapped area of policy opportunity, particularly given the growth in local food businesses in the last five years and the interest in food more generally among St. John's residents.

#### ***Embedding food in planning***

Two informants articulated what it would mean for the city-region to be more forward-thinking and intentional, even within existing municipal government mandates and functions, to accomplish progressive food policy aims:

*It really is a matter of how can we rally our, assemble our planning staff in such a way that we anticipate what [we] can [do].* [2-9]

*If it doesn't conform with all of that but it's a really good project then what do we need to do to accommodate it within our planning framework and [act] right through the framework, so that's one way.* [2-11]

Other informants commented on how St. John's could simply be more conscious of the constraints and enablers for small food businesses in everyday municipal actions. Bylaws and implementation for routine municipal functions and services such as snow clearing and parking can have a disproportionate impact for small food businesses.

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While this report had a relatively narrow focus on a specific subset of SME-based economic activities within the St. John's city-region, it was striking how often informants saw their own work as connected broadly to the food system in Newfoundland and Labrador, and beyond. Informants raised a breadth of food policy issues that were important to them, from 'grow it' (primary agricultural production) to 'throw it' (food waste) across the food system.<sup>33</sup>

There was a particular emphasis among informants on how aspects of agricultural production and land use designations needed to be considered more consciously within city-region authority and control.

In instances where municipalities had taken actions to protect and preserve food within land uses, it was not clear that this was intentional or by design, as matter in the public interest. Rather, informants described how municipal government was more often reactive, prompted to take action in response to businesses raising particular concerns, rather than taking a proactive food planning approach.

This reactive approach was used with small businesses, as well as larger food businesses exerting their influence on policy and planning.

For example, one key informant recalled an instance at the Donovans Business Park in Mount Pearl, where the municipality negotiated a land use conflict between two private sector interests, an offshore oil company and a supermarket corporation, where a discretionary use of the park proposed by the oil company was refused on the basis of objections from the supermarket corporation.

Donovans Business Park is a useful example of a physical 'hub' where a dedicated approach to food within city-region planning could have both local effects for St. John's and broader effects for the province.

The NL Housing Corporation had initially put together a plan for Donovans Business Park in the 1960s, following upon the establishment of the newly incorporated (1955) and growing municipality of Mount Pearl, and later under the auspices of the quasi-regional St. John's Metropolitan Area Board. Today, the business park is the largest in the province and is a major hub for the NL food system. It is home to the few food distributors that supply retail food premises province-wide. Use of the park and planning for the area in terms of taxation arrangements and transportation have direct impacts on these businesses.

As such the municipality (of Mount Pearl) has considerable control at this node in the food system, and yet the example in the quotation above was one of the rare instances in which specific policy levers related to the operation of the park were mentioned. Similarly, in St. John's, co-operation between the municipality, the province, and the private sector determine the functions and operation of Oceanex via the Port of St. John's, another important node, which only came up through specific prompting with municipal informants. Food policy and planning for the city-region, and indeed the province, should examine the food flows and nodes in the food system and how municipalities could optimize their relationship to transportation for the benefit of local residents.

**4.2 The policy context for food innovation**

The second main finding of this research is the extent to which considerable—and in some cases readily remediable—barriers exist in the food policy context encountered by small food firms in the St. John's city-region. Barriers identified by informants were typically a mix of municipal and provincial policy levers. Some distinction does need to be made, therefore, between municipal policy levers for food and the provincial policy environments that define them. For example, municipal financing arrangements are dependent on provincial authority. Some of the barriers are also generally relevant to a range of SME types, not specifically food. This is in and of itself valuable: where food issues intersect for food businesses and other types of business, it is an excellent example of how an abiding interest in food among policy actors and city residents can actually drive new dialogue on a range of beneficial policies. Municipal food strategies elsewhere in Canada and globally have taken this approach, where in taking on food issues in a more dedicated way, the resulting policy initiatives have paid dividends for other aspects of city-building.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the municipality is interested in supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, and in strategic planning documents, the City of St. John's has described how it envisions its role proactively in doing so. What this study has demonstrated is that the city-region could be much more proactive and intentional in how it uses municipal policy instruments that address food businesses, to enable innovation as part of the evolution of the local economy.

For example, in 2011, the St. John's Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture created an economic development plan entitled, *Roadmap 2021*. In combination with public and private consultations, the plan's working committee performed a jurisdictional scan of 22 national and five international city regions.

Food is mentioned just once in the *Roadmap 2021* report, within one of the recommended actions to support St. John's as a "location of choice for business and investment". It recommends that the city "enhance the presence of a community marketplace" that could "support local food and products, celebrate multiculturalism, encourage social cohesion and contribute to the vibrancy of a city." Many of the other actions in that section of the Roadmap discuss enabling larger commercial developments and attracting investment. While these are key considerations in understanding economic development, the key informants in our study identified that a much greater emphasis could be placed on existing and local businesses to support innovation and growth in a way that sustains the economy and creates resilience.

Informants described multiple ways in which the municipal government could bolster economic development through food, using its existing tools and sharing information in ways that would benefit existing or emerging smaller businesses that are exploring opportunities to strengthen business locally.

***Linking municipal support to entrepreneur capacity building***

Nearly all informants that were operating a business in our study identified information gaps in how they interacted with the municipality. In some cases, informants were not aware of existing information and resources, but more often, the city had created resources that entrepreneurs found challenging to access or were not communicated in ways that food entrepreneurs felt reached out

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to them. A critical component to entrepreneurial success is access to and uptake of information. Economic research has demonstrated a gradient of informational asymmetries by firm size.<sup>34</sup> Financing, regulations, knowledge of regulations, advertising, design, and level of education can all act as determinants of knowledge, knowledge uptake and utilization during the financing stages of entrepreneurship, crucial to market entry.

For example, some of the principal risks and concerns for a new small business owner in the food industry include start-up capital and the need for social supports during a time of deep investments of their own labour and time in building the business: this is not uncommon for most sectors. To address this, informants described how the policy environment could better establish linkages to financial supports. They also articulated how municipal and provincial policy could actually present barriers that drain a small business' resources indirectly during vital business development time: through lengthy application processes, delays in approvals, or a challenging process for meeting regulatory requirements that were often poorly tailored to the type, scale, or scope of the business being proposed. Some of this issues were unearthed through examining the development of new food products.

Globally, a large group of economic activities falling within the area of secondary (value-add) processing of food have been 'hollowed out' or concentrated with larger players in the food system over the last four decades or more. These forces have also been at play in the Newfoundland and Labrador food system. What is striking however in analyzing our research with food entrepreneurs in the city-region is how these policy legacies have created disproportionate challenges for some businesses involved in secondary processing activities within the scope of existing food licenses and regulations. This is an example of where although many of these policy instruments fall under provincial jurisdiction, the municipality has an important role in entrepreneurial capacity building around regulatory issues, and linking businesses to relevant functions across government. Currently there appears to be a disconnect between available municipal resources and support for starting or operating a food business and the city, and the practical challenges businesses are actually facing.

One interpretation for this disconnect between business needs and the policy context is that governments and entrepreneurs may be accustomed to thinking quite differently about what is needed to launch new businesses, especially small food businesses. From a policy standpoint, the existing structures, processes, and resources are intended to ensure a common foundation for all those operating a business in the municipality. For entrepreneurs who are focused on envisioning their unique value to the marketplace, these processes may seem unduly restrictive, and it may be difficult to interpret how more generalized processes and resources apply to them.

Some informants commented on barriers that were specific to them as a subgroup of new business owners, for example, being a newcomer to Canada. Newcomers face a range of barriers to starting a business. One newcomer who had been able to launch her food business successfully through the St. John's Farmer's Market talked about the municipal knowledge communication style, *"If the City can at least put out the information, other than on their website, especially for newcomer who don't know a lot and isn't like a resident. [2-10]"*

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Another business owner honed in on the tensions in accessing resources in a way that he could clearly see to be relevant for his business.

*Do you want me to help you put in the application because you can qualify for this, this, or this. These are things that we don't know because you know we're focused on other things... You go onto a government website, you got 500 links over here, you got a dozen up here, you got to search, you know you got to click on it, then it doesn't come up or some, it's the wrong application. Just make it more streamlined, have it like a welcome package. Welcome to the neighborhood, here's an envelope. [2-1]*

One new business owner recounted how he felt that the onus had been placed on him to interpret how policy applied to his business. This was a disappointing and often exasperating way to work with those whom he had expected to be experts in the field. He expressed how his commitment to compliance with regulation seemed to be for naught. Instead, his take-home message from interactions with government were,

*Stop producing, stop everything, and we want you to figure out approval like with no standards, no guidelines, just figure it out, come back to us, and then we'll see if we approve it. ...if someone's got approval...if you did the exact same thing it doesn't mean you're going to be approved, because it's all on an individual basis, all individual, individual. ...I would, if I was to develop another product that I wanted to sell to the public I would almost rather not. Do it under the table, and not do it at all, instead of going through the government process. [2-4]*

Although what entrepreneurs said was striking, what was even clearer in this research was that actors within government felt similarly frustrated about their own policy environment in relation to food business development. They recounted how the policy environment was essentially geared towards a default of refusing new business ideas, rather than identifying opportunities for exciting, original ideas or those with special merit to the food system to fit within existing structures.

Within government, those who do wish to support novel interpretations of policy or new business ideas find themselves struggling with their context or mandate. As one municipal government staff member recalled with regard to municipal resources for development applications,

*It's been produced, it's even been designed, embedded, yet we're not making that available to applicants which I think is a huge failing. ...I mean I've sort of created my own kind of little flow chart so when people ask me about it I can [go through it with them], and type it out in a written form. [2-9]*

Indeed, government staff often referred to how they had personal interest and investment in advancing and supporting local small businesses in food, but felt disadvantaged or inflexible to propose changes that might alter the dynamics of interactions between small businesses and governments. The same municipal staffer noted, “*We are bound to what council directs us to do ultimately.*” He also mused on how the municipality could be more selective and strategic about matters within its authority. “*I think a lot of it is we've been a have-not province for so long and the idea of refusing a development application ridiculous.*” [2-9]

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Some policy actors within government described how they saw themselves as established policy or business gatekeepers, dutifully denying applicants time and again. One provincial government staff member described her expectations working with potential entrepreneurs:

*I've had a lot of phone calls from people saying, 'I'm growing vegetables in my backyard and I have this great recipe from my aunt and I think everybody is going to want it and everybody may want it' and when I tell them okay, well this is great. Now, give me the ingredients, we'll have to set you up to have a nutritional facts table and, by the way, for every product that's going to cost you \$800.00 to have a lab analysis and a nutritional facts table. And then we got to look at packaging options so you might want to go to three or four different places and do a tradeshow and see what packaging options are. And how about extending your shelf life, we should do some studies on that. And then we should do some studies on a couple of other things. And by the end of the telephone call I usually get a, 'Oh, maybe I didn't think this through.' ... I'm in sector development. So I work one-on-one with clients when they have an issue. I kind of consider myself the traffic cop for the sector. [2-7]*

### **Local food and regional development**

A culture of support for new businesses and local businesses prevails in St. John's city-region, and Newfoundland and Labrador. However, this dynamic, which included the notion of maintaining a 'taste of place', was not always linked to how small business could be a key part of advancing the municipal or provincial economy.

*... as a province we should be supporting any projects that people, like good solid ideas that people are trying to do in the province ... Like we should be producing more food products locally; making local jobs, feeding the people that are here, right? Cause you know it would be our, like it's just really economy growth. [2-4]*

The food entrepreneurs in our study explained numerous structural disadvantages to promoting local food products for local markets and local consumption, in contrast to business development with an export orientation.

Some informants who operated small local food businesses noted that to address this required a rethinking of not only entrepreneurship at the retail level, but enabling factors in the provincial food system as a whole. For example, an informant proposed a greater engagement for distributors in a supportive retail food environment, suggesting, "So if you involve them as part of the solution to the problem rather than promoting the fact that we don't have distribution maybe we solve the problem without having to spend a ton of money." [2-3]

### **Leveraging the work of other city-regions**

Thus far, the emphasis in this section of the report has discussed how existing policies are interpreted and communicated. However, informants also identified gaps that could be addressed through new policy development. The literature on SME policy environments suggests that concerns about novel policy instruments may be exaggerated in smaller markets, whereas larger markets that are already diverse in terms of products, services, and a supplier base may be at a relatively more mature state of policy elaboration. As such these larger markets are better placed to accommodate policy changes to align with emergent products and services, and it would seem that smaller markets need to be much more strategic about how they do so.

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Again, this is an opportunity for city-region food policy and planning. This could mean the exchange of evidence and experiences among several municipalities in a city-region, or across municipalities in different provincial jurisdictions; for example, St. John's has been compared to Saskatoon in terms of local food issues, as described in the discussion below. Where policy capacity may be limited for smaller municipalities, it is especially important for them to leverage their relationships with other municipalities to establish enabling policy structures.

### **4.3 Policy environments that support entrepreneurialism, not entrepreneurs**

The third main finding in this study was a conceptual advancement, in terms of empirical evidence of a distinction between entrepreneurs (characteristics of actors) and entrepreneurialism (strategies that such actors employ) that may be important in analyzing the potential for advancing municipal food policy and planning in the future.

We found that entrepreneurialism (as a strategy) is enacted by both business owners and the range of policy actors who support them in negotiating the city-region or provincial policy space.

This makes a contribution to the evidence base on the health promotion potential for small food businesses, in particular, how food policy and planning with healthier communities in mind should be negotiated and coordinated among the actors who bring diverse sectoral interests and values to working in the food business space.

For example, a growing public health literature on healthy retailing interventions in small food stores demonstrates that they can garner strong public and community support,<sup>25,27,35</sup> but are often led by public health, planning, or policy actors who bring specific principles and goals to a retail food business environment. The same literature articulates how store owner motivation, capacity, and behaviour are crucial to effective intervention implementation,<sup>26,35-37</sup> yet key retailer concerns such as financial impact of public health interventions is virtually absent from the health literature.<sup>38</sup>

#### ***Source of innovation***

Like others who have studied entrepreneurial activity, we found that actors our study who engaged in entrepreneurial activity innovated in terms of new ideas, practices, or products; additionally we noted that individuals were skilled in establishing new relationships between people or social groups. Entrepreneurial actors described how they identified a need or gap, and an imperative to respond to it, even under conditions of uncertainty or previous failure.

*If I had my time back, maybe I would have done this a little differently. But when you're presented in the situation and you're like, you see the possibility.... that's one thing I didn't want to do, was take a couple of years off to go work in an oil, offshore or something, was because I was like, I'm afraid that someone else is going to do this in the time that I'm gone. [2-1]*

#### ***Drivers of innovation are practical***

We observed that entrepreneurial actors did not simply leap to fill a perceived gap. They did so purposefully, with specific experience applicable to the situation, or by applying their existing knowledge in new ways. In doing so, entrepreneurial actors played an important role in catalyzing behaviour among their constituents. We use the governing term 'constituency' rather

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than customers to describe how the entrepreneurial actors in our research defined a set of social groups on whose behalf they felt they acted as agent, including customers, community members, or other actors in the local food policy ecosystem. This is because not only the food business 'entrepreneurs' but some of the other key informants in our study, such as actors within government, often exercised entrepreneurial strategies.

This responsiveness was also a bidirectional process: entrepreneurial actors found ways to observe the needs of their constituency, as well as to be open to input from them. This information would then be used to assess what 'demand' existed for social change.

We found that the strength of engagement with their constituency gave entrepreneurial actors a confidence and drive to apply their practical skills. Constituency relationships—and entrepreneurship more broadly—were often referred to by participants as 'personal' rather than professional. Participants spoke of personal financial or reputational risks in implementing innovations, and a personal role in the success or longevity of the innovations they introduced.

*The success of our business essentially is on our shoulders. It's, we do this because we love it and so do ninety percent of the people we know through the personal connections, and because we're all very passionate about what we do, it makes getting the connections or keeping the connections a little bit better. It's always the same handful of people doing a lot of the stuff. (2-10)*

### **Tenacity as an entrepreneurial strategy**

Other research has articulated how entrepreneurial actors are typically persistent to achieve their aims—over months or more often years.<sup>39,40</sup> Tenacity can be viewed as a character trait or quality; as one participant called it, "I think it's because I'm like a dog with a bone I didn't let it go. [2-2]" We also saw, however, that tenacity is something that entrepreneurs practice. Entrepreneurial actors were tenacious in various ways—in their persistence with testing different solutions to problems; a willingness to manage own and others' expectations; and a long term view of the process of innovation.

*Well we kept looking around and yeah we were travelling...and we said okay, well I'll try that and see if—and everybody loved it. They want to be able to pick out their own sized potatoes, they want one carrot if they want it, or they would want one parsnip and so it worked perfect.... every year we've tried to add some, to grow something new to offer and see what's in the supermarkets that people are buying, cause if we can grow it here, then why not, we'll try it and let's see, so that's worked out. Like kale. That stuff grows like weeds. [2-6]*

A small food business owner who had developed a local sea salt and was attempting to bring it to market in the same policy environment, also articulated the tenacity with which he had to navigate policy rules. After weeks of inquiries with provincial and federal agencies, and independent pursuit of food safety testing and appropriate licenses, he was finally informed that he did not actually require a permit in the first place.

Entrepreneurial actors sense that something is next—the trajectory is one of forward progress. This doesn't always mean that their actions are always rewarded with positive gains towards an end, but they recognize the value in propelling an initiative, even while waiting for earlier results.

***Merging theories of entrepreneurship***

Social entrepreneurship' is a term that has gained traction as a means to address collective problems and create value for citizens through leading social changes that span the non-profit, private, and public sector.<sup>39,41</sup> Social entrepreneurs have been characterized in how they differ from business entrepreneurs: in how they apply their entrepreneurial orientation, and in what drives their work<sup>41</sup>. In addition to networking and risk management skills, social entrepreneurs' work is organized around a core social value proposition as opposed to a market niche-oriented proposition; they use networks for credibility as opposed to capital investment; risk credibility and reputation rather than finances; and gain social and human capital instead of financial rewards<sup>42</sup>.

What our research indicated is that it may be time to begin to draw lessons from social entrepreneurship literature, but in relation to the policy entrepreneurship literature and marketing literature as well.

In the business and marketing literature, special attention has been paid to those who lead successful small-and-medium-sized enterprises and innovate within them. As described earlier, small retail businesses play a significant role in national economies, and provide important social and economic services to communities.<sup>43</sup> The retail business literature describes not only individuals but firms as holding an 'entrepreneurial orientation' associated with the level of competitiveness and success of the enterprise.<sup>44</sup> The characteristics of entrepreneurial orientation include flexibility, creativity, and adaptability, to facilitate the ability to identify changes and exploit them.<sup>45</sup> Hence, an entrepreneurial orientation in the retail sector is associated with an ability to introduce small, sustainable changes to existing business models that are attentive to both current and future customer needs.<sup>44,45</sup>

In public policy studies, distinctive actors who catalyze social change were termed 'policy entrepreneurs' by Kingdon in his influential Multiple Streams Theory.<sup>40</sup> Policy entrepreneurs capitalize on windows of opportunity to align or 'couple' policy problems, potential solutions, and political processes receptive to their ideas, and in so doing, mobilize change in the policy agenda. Kingdon articulates how policy entrepreneurs possess three important characteristics: they are well connected or highly effective in forging strategic relationships; they have a voice or claim to be heard; and are tenacious. Public health professionals have been analyzed as policy entrepreneurs in research on school health environments<sup>46</sup>, child health promotion at the municipal level<sup>47</sup>, and tobacco control.<sup>48</sup>

More recently, policy researchers have analyzed the innovative work individuals do in the public sector, when faced with uncertainty and growing complexity of policy issue areas, and shifts in how we approach the business of governing. This is a revival of interest in practices of 'street-level bureaucrats' who effectively become the face of public policy for citizens.<sup>49</sup> Lipsky's work examined the perils of discretionary actions by practitioners in public sector bureaucracies, arguing for institutional reform and greater accountability to citizens who could become an important force in shaping practitioner behaviour. Policy scientists in the interpretivist tradition have since taken up this question of how front-line workers not only implement but actively shape policy. Van Hulst and colleagues describe the 'exemplary practitioner' who solves problems by embracing uncertain and ambiguous conditions, and responding creatively to those

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conditions by applying a well-developed repertoire of tools on a case-by-case basis.<sup>50-52</sup> In a study of urban social development in five Dutch cities, they conclude that exemplary practitioners “show a mix and dose of entrepreneurialism, strategic networking and empathic engagement that differ from standard bureaucracy” (p.446),<sup>51</sup> but that this entrepreneurial work may be vulnerable if their environment is unreceptive to their way of working. Cels, deJong and Nauta prefer the term ‘social innovators’ to articulate this type of public sector action, highlighting the ability of these individuals to leverage the legitimacy, support, and resources that are essential for operating within institutional mandates.<sup>39</sup>

### ***What kinds of structures are required to support entrepreneurialism?***

Currently, the actors who support each other in the St. John's city-region, within and across sectors, do so relatively informally and peripherally to formal policy processes. From a policy entrepreneurship standpoint, this may make some sense.

Those actors working successfully on advancing food issues in the city-region may be used to thinking across the ‘silos’ that currently define food systems and governance, and may not require specific institutional arrangements to accomplish their policy or business aims. Rather, such actors saw the informal brokering of policy to be most important.

*That's my greatest strength [it] is people. It's not particularly writing stuff, it's about bringing people together and figuring out. [2-2]*

However, several informants proposed actions and identified emerging initiatives that suggest interest in exploring more formal mechanisms for intersectoral action, and explicitly making the linkages that seem intuitive in food as a policy issue. Noted one informant,

*The conversation has got to go across the table and not bounce off people. It's got to be back and forth conversation because food is about food security; it is about rural development, it is about tourism, it is about industry as in restaurants. It's about all of those things, and it's also about feeding local people good, healthy food so we need all those departments to have that conversation. [2-3]*

## **5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

This environmental scan of food policy levers, focusing on forms of food entrepreneurship in the SME sector in city-regions, provides an entry point for considering how municipalities can nurture innovation within local and regional food systems. Our analysis is rooted in the city-region of St. John's but holds significance for planning for the Northeast Avalon, across Newfoundland and Labrador municipalities, and elsewhere in Canada. Moreover, it illustrates how nurturing innovation in the food system can be done in a way that aligns municipal economic and social development goals, with health promotion aims.

Although we have made allusions to future policy directions in the results section above, in this section, we will summarize and discuss the opportunities for the City of St. John's and other NL municipalities to operationalize a healthy and sustainable food system in how they handle innovation, and in turn, to use food innovation to enhance population health and urban and regional planning more broadly.

We will focus this discussion on three sets of recommendations: making a commitment to policy transparency and a culture of information sharing; intersectoral engagement and opportunities for collaboration in the food supply chain; and setting bold targets by embedding food and health in planning documents.

### **5.1 A commitment to policy transparency and a culture of information sharing**

In Canada, 97.9% of businesses are small businesses (defined as <100 employees), employing 70.5% of the private labour force; over half (53%) are 'micro' businesses with just 1 to 4 employees.<sup>17</sup> As of 2013, Canada was ranked 3rd internationally for ease of starting a business by the World Bank.<sup>30</sup> The World Bank rankings are calculated based on the national average of procedures, time, cost and paid in minimum capital for starting a business.

Although this is encouraging, Canada is home to a breadth of economic diversity. According to a 2013 provincial analysis by the federal government (Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada), NL was home to 40.5 SMEs per 1,000 working-age inhabitants while Saskatchewan and Alberta contained 47.8 and 50.3 respectively.<sup>53</sup> The proportions of SMEs per capita in urban versus rural NL were 42.4% and 57.6%, respectively. In contrast, the same report noted that in Saskatchewan, 45.1% of SMEs are rural and 54.9% urban. Saskatchewan ranks number one in terms of high-growth and number of SMEs headed by young entrepreneurs (aged <40 years), and has more than double the SME employees of NL.

Notably, Saskatchewan SMEs reported worker shortage as their number one external obstacle to business growth while the Atlantic SMEs reported government regulations as their number one external obstacle. This was echoed in our report.

The research described in this report has demonstrated that it is not only the policy structures per se that present barriers to innovation in the St. John's city-region, but rather, that a lack of transparency about policy creates particular challenges for small firms in navigating the policy

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context effectively, which has a disproportionate effect on a small versus a large business. Our research also demonstrated that particular insights about policy transparency can be gained from a dedicated examination of the food sector.

This is an example of where sector-focused business incubation has played a role in other jurisdictions in improving the policy environment. St. John's has itself taken this approach in fostering developments in the local crafts industry, and in Toronto and Saskatchewan, similar entrepreneurship incubation efforts are being pursued, with regional development in mind.

The types of comprehensive services that could be made to current and prospective food entrepreneurs include business registration assistance, market research, and interactive access to professional advisors with connections to both municipal and provincial government; linkages to the university could offer a structured curriculum aspect while presenting opportunities to knowledge exchange. Some of this work is underway with Memorial University but a greater emphasis should be placed on the unique value of food to the city-region.

Local food businesses could be part of a much larger conversation around a healthy and sustainable city-region, and the regional plan renegotiation in addition to the municipal election in fall 2017 present opportunities for this. As described elsewhere in this report, food businesses have the particular advantage of offering much more than food to the local economy, from green growth to food access, to culture and tourism.

### **5.2 Intersectoral engagement and collaboration in the food supply chain**

Intersectoral action and information exchange can also be facilitated by enabling and enriching the existing interactions within entrepreneurial ecosystems. Two alternatives have been demonstrated to have success in other jurisdictions seeking to advance city-region food policy and planning.

First, food policy councils are an innovative way to engage citizens in shaping their food systems. Food policy councils have been around for a few decades but the creation of new councils has definitely accelerated in the last five years or so. Over 100 councils exist across North America and new ones are emerging all the time. The elaboration of a Food Policy Council has often been an initial step in a multi-year trajectory towards defining a food strategy for a city-region.<sup>1</sup>

A food policy council is typically a municipal or regional group that becomes a public forum for identifying and analyzing ways to strengthen and improve local food systems. A key part of why they work is that they bring together diverse players and leverage these different inputs to come up with creative solutions.

As outlined at the outset of this report, the global food system has become increasingly compartmentalized and siloed over the last century. But food also has a power to bring people together. Municipalities around the world have increasingly adopted food as a focus, because it is an attractive, flexible, and effective vehicle for planning healthier communities and addressing multiple policy priorities at once.

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Around the world, some food policy councils are standalone not-for-profits while others are formally embedded in local government. The most successful councils to date appear to be those that have a strong relationship or dedicated support from public health or local government. However, there is no one perfect recipe for a food policy council. Moreover, while larger cities are receiving a great deal of attention around food work, smaller communities—urban, rural, and remote—are also making their mark in many policy areas. Food policy councils are an expression of the interest in creating healthy and vibrant communities through local action and innovation.

A second important alternative, with a relationship to policy recommendation 5.1, is the development of a market mechanism for collaboration. Municipalities have an important role to play in enabling and supporting how market spaces, but also other locally embedded food businesses actually incubate, strengthen, and serve as information nodes for the industry as a whole. Market spaces offer a physical marketplace for direct sales between primary agricultural producers and consumers, as well as contributing regional agro-tourism, promoting sustainability, fostering local economic growth including on-site mentoring or space needed by new vendors, and a welcoming space.

Regional farmers' markets can function as communities for entrepreneurs acting within the food system, as well as having other benefits such as business incubator functions and establishing a gathering place. Our research has indicated that the St. John's Farmers' Market is already fulfilling some of these roles. One informant described the contribution of the market mechanism to his business as "*massive, massive*"; that "*if it wasn't for the farmer's market I, that was the thing, I didn't know what exactly I, how I was going to crack into a marketplace.*" [2-1]

In addition, although we have not been able to discuss this in detail within the scope of this report, some successful local restaurants in the city have played a similar role.

Over the course of this study the St. John's Farmers' Market has grown in size and scope, and with municipal support, will be moving into a permanent structure in a former bus depot. This may prove to be an essential municipal investment in the regional food system. Again, Saskatoon presents a useful comparison with a successful farmers' market of a comparable size whose growth and embedding in a refurbished permanent structure was supported by the municipality. The location of the new permanent market site may also over time serve as a built environment counterpoint to the Donovans Business Park, similar to older municipal market sites, in making the connections between food producers and distributors with their consumers more visible.

Contemporary farmers' markets and thriving restaurants that connect diverse suppliers and new entrants to markets in city-regions are more than the sum of their parts. The market mechanism should be understood more broadly as a strategy for local economic development, not just a physical space, that can achieve a range of old and new food policy aims.

### **5.3 Setting bold targets by embedding food and health in planning documents**

Our final recommendation is that each instance of formal policy and planning moving forward in the city-region should be considered an opportunity to embed food and health considerations.

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As described earlier in this report, this does not mean that food needs to be at the top of everyone's policy priority list, all of the time. Rather, enshrining food in policy and planning can offer insights into the interconnected gains that can be made for a healthy population and a thriving future using policy instruments that connect health for example with local economic development.

Embedding food may also pay substantial dividends in terms of establishing institutional supports for entrepreneurialism, among both business actors and the government staff who support them. As one informant in provincial government concluded, *"Once it's embedded in policy then you know no matter who leaves then you can say well that's your policy can we get someone to look at that."* [2-2]

## **6. KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION**

Research from this report has been shared in working manuscripts and presentations for academic venues, including for international audiences, such as a Food Governance conference hosted by the University of Sydney in November 2016; a forthcoming World Congress on Public Health presentation in Melbourne in April 2017; and an invited lecture for the University of Sydney's Menzies Centre for Health Policy and Charles Perkins Centre Food Governance Node, also in April 2017.

In addition to communicating the results of this research in academic venues such as research conferences and journal article manuscripts for scholarly venues, we have taken an integrated approach to knowledge mobilization throughout the project in order to inform emergent policy developments in the city-region.

Emergent themes have been raised with stakeholders consulted in a professional capacity for feedback and to begin establishing the groundwork for future focused knowledge mobilization efforts. Meetings with the Harris Centre and Office of Public Engagement were also informative in terms of guiding knowledge mobilization.

The main set of practical knowledge mobilization activities arising from the project so far has been to directly guide the establishment of the St. John's Food Policy Council (<http://sjfpc.ca/>), the first of its kind in the province. Food First NL has coordinated the inauguration of the Council with the City of St. John's and this project's support.

The City of St. John's endorsed the development of a St. John's Food Policy Council in December 2013. Councillor Dave Lane, Chairperson of the Environmental Advisory Committee, has been a key link and champion for the process. Food First NL brought together a broad group of food system stakeholders in an inaugural meeting in 2014, and a working group was established over the winter of 2014-2015 to form the council.

The City of St. John's also appointed one of its municipal planners to be the staff person supporting the new Council's work. The research in this report and support by the Harris Centre was instrumental in helping us to gather information as well as develop local recommendations to shape the early structure, function, and activities of the Council.

The Council launched in 2015 and to date has met throughout 2016, releasing one policy paper on food waste for a municipal policy audience that was shared with Municipalities NL.

## **7. APPENDIX**

### **7.1 Moments in the policy trajectory**

Over the course of our interviews with key informants, particularly those working in government, they identified particular policy events, as well as enactment of legislation or policy frameworks, of interest to the history of food policy in relation to planning for St. John's city-region. This was not in response to a particular interview question about the historical context or policy trajectory, but often, a way to describe how they understood current food policy levers as emanating from earlier developments. These policy moments are compiled in Box 1 below.

#### **Box 1. Moments in food policy and planning for the city-region**

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1955  | Incorporation of Mount Pearl as a municipality   |
| 1960s | Establishment of Donovans Business Park  |
| 1970s | Last major regional plan negotiation for the Northeast Avalon  |
| 1980s | Regional planning overseen largely by the St. John's Metropolitan Area Board with an impact on agricultural lands, forest, and watershed related to food production, particularly in terms of urban and rural regional land use designations |
| 1980s | Establishment of the provincial Department of Urban and Regional Planning  |
| 1990  | <i>City of St. John's Act</i> , RSNL1990 CHAPTER C-17; <i>City of Mount Pearl Act</i> , RSNL1990 CHAPTER C-16  |
| 1992  | Cod moratorium   |
| 1990s | Provincial government retrenchment and downsizing, with an impact on policy and planning capacity  |
| 1998  | NL Public Health Association releases its first Position Paper on Food Security  |
| 1999  | <i>Municipalities Act</i> , SNL1999 CHAPTER M-24   |
| 2000  | <i>Urban and Rural Planning Act</i> , SNL2000 CHAPTER U-8  |
| 2006  | Provincial Food and Nutrition Action Plan  |
| 2007  | Food Security Network of NL (now Food First NL) hosts first provincial Food Security Assembly in St. John's  |
| 2008  | Establishment of provincial government Interdepartmental Food Security Working Group   |
| 2008  | First full season of the St. John's Farmers' Market  |
| 2010s | Changes to the City of St. John's taxation code, combining commercial space per square foot and general operating taxes, and thus potentially streamlining for some food businesses  |
| 2010  | St. John's Farmers' Market Cooperative formed  |
| 2012  | Regional Economic Development Boards lose ACOA funding   |
| 2015  | Direct purchasing from fish harvesters legalized, reconnecting retailers and consumers directly to harvesters in a commercial relationship   |
| 2015  | Launch of the St. John's Food Policy Council   |

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