

The West Island Food System

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In partnership with Food Justice & Sustainability at Dawson College

Highlights

The West Island Community Resource Center partnered with the Food Justice & Sustainability Hub at Dawson College to better understand its local food system.

There are several key features:

- A food system dominated by large-scale outlets (22)
- There are independent specialty and ethnic stores (18)
- There are two neighborhood food markets
- 5% of farmland is considered fallow

This assessment also shed light in terms of possible action to build the local food system :

1. More research and engagement is needed with specific farms, corporate and independent retailers and fresh food markets.
2. Work with farms and neighboring municipalities to advocate for land preservation, create market development and job creation opportunities for farms
3. Promote measures and innovation at the retail level (ex : solidarity pricing schemes, rooftop greenhouse, waste reduction, other charitable activities.)

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Food Production.....	4
Food Distribution and Sale.....	7
Food Waste Management.....	12
Conclusions & Points of Intervention.....	14
Appendix.....	16

Introduction

As part of its work in combating food insecurity, the West Island Community Resource Center (CRC) has commissioned this report on the food system in the West Island. The report began with the goal of understanding how food is grown in the West Island, how it is transported and sold to West Island grocery stores and consumers, and how this food is disposed of. In so doing, the CRC hopes to identify points of intervention in our food system that may serve as the basis for future solutions to the food insecurity problem.

As part of this report, the CRC interviewed farmers, food distributors, food retailers, and municipalities to understand the many moving parts involved in ensuring that a community is well-fed. The search for answers has given us down answers previously unknown to our organization, but has also illuminated roadblocks to the fight against food insecurity. There is much that we still do not know, and better understanding the West Island in particular remains a topic worthy of greater discussion and research.

This report would not have been possible without the generous help and resources from Food Justice & Sustainability Hub at Dawson College. The Food Justice team has spent a large amount of time orienting the CRC in the right direction, and providing a wealth of information and resources in order to better construct a picture of our food system. Special thanks to Hugo Martorell, Gaëlle Janvier, Rachel Bagg, Anna-Liisa Aunio, Karine Saboui, and Josh Neale for their dedication and passion.

I also extend a note of thanks to my colleagues at the CRC, particularly Anne-Marie Angers-Trottier, Cristina Colt, Ruth Greenbank, and Sandra Watson. Furthermore, I would like to voice my appreciation the individuals and organizations that participated in questioning as part of this report. Its findings, such as they are, would not be possible without your help.

Food Production

The West Island hosts the only available land for agricultural production on the Island of Montreal. This is known as Montreal's permanent agricultural zone. As of 2015, this zone represented 2047 hectares of territory, which makes up 4% of Montreal's total surface area, and 13% of the West Island's surface area (PDZA, 2015). The permanent agricultural zone can be found in four West Island municipalities: L'Île-Bizard-Sainte-Geneviève, Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, and Senneville (see map below).

Carte 2 : Localisation de la zone agricole permanente de l'agglomération de Montréal



Facts about the permanent agricultural zone (PDZA, 2015)

- 21% of the permanent agricultural zone was being cultivated as of 2015
- 5% of the permanent agricultural zone remains fallow, but has the potential to be cultivated. The PDZA does not specify where specifically this land is located.
- 48% of the PAZ is considered natural environment consisting of woodlands, and herbaceous areas
- Golf courses and residential areas cover 17% and 9% of the PAZ, respectively
- The cost of land in the PAZ was \$26,000 per hectare in 2013, significantly higher than the rest of the CMM (\$13,125 per hectare in 2011, on average)

Farms in the agricultural zone

In 2014, eleven companies were engaged in the cultivation of land in the West Island. Many of these companies are not family owned, and often have a social, educational and/or environmentally responsible mandates (PDZA, 2015).

Most of the growers in the West Island are primarily engaged in the cultivation of vegetables. The Macdonald campus farm, which is owned by McGill University, is the only food producer in the West Island that practices the raising of livestock as a primary activity (PDZA, 2015). Three companies primarily grow food crops (ex. wheat), which occupy the largest amount of surface area in the agricultural zone (PDZA, 2015).

Food producers in the West Island face the following challenges in the cultivation and sale of local produce (OCPM, 2012):

1. Market pressures favor large-scale agricultural operations over local agriculture
2. The trend of urban sprawl uses up land that could otherwise be used for agriculture
3. Price of land, as well as land succession present barriers to entry for many local producers
 - a. Land is too expensive and scarce
 - b. No effective system of incubation/financial support exists for new agricultural operations
 - c. Food market is tightly controlled by large grocery chains (Metro Inc., Loblaw's/Provigo, Sobeys/IGA), which limits access of farms to a mass market

A Survey of West Island and Western Montérégie Farms

As part of this portrait, the CRC conducted a short survey of farms that either produce fruits and vegetables in the West Island, or who sell fruits and vegetables at locations in the West Island. These locations could include farmer's markets, grocery stores, drop-off points, or direct-to-consumer food baskets.

A publicly accessible list of all farms operating in or selling to the West Island is not available. Organizations that do possess such lists, such as MAPAQ and Union des Producteurs Agricoles (UPA), could not provide them as part of this research due to concerns over the privacy of these farmers. As such, this survey identified fourteen farms meeting the above criteria based on publicly available knowledge, including internet searches, producers registered with West Island public markets, and word of mouth. Of these fourteen farms, ten responded to this survey. The farms identified are the following:

Producer	Location
Ferme L'Anse au Sable	Île-Perrot
Ferme Coopérative Tournesol	Les Cèdres
Ferme D-Trois-Pierres	Pierrefonds
Ferme de l'Île	Senneville
Ferme de la Rive	Rigaud

Ferme du Campus Macdonald (McGill University)	Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue
Jardin des Anges	Laval
Jardins Carya	Senneville
Jardins de la Montagne	Rougemont
Jardins Normandeu	Beauharnois
Lufa Farms	Ahuntsic, Laval and Anjou
Quinn Farm	Île-Perrot
Santropol Roulant	Senneville
Tierra Viva	Mirabel

*Farms shaded in grey did not respond to this survey

Results

Points of sale: Of the ten respondents to this survey, the majority did not sell to grocery stores, be they corporately owned or independently owned. The two farms that did engage in sale with grocery stores sold their produce to large grocery chains like Metro and IGA, although this did not represent the majority of their sales. Almost all farms surveyed offered their produce for sale at farmer's markets or on-site at farm stands. The only two farms that did not offer their produce at farm stands offered food delivery baskets to pick-up locations in the West Island.

Half of the farms surveyed sold at least half of their produce in the West Island (in many cases, it was nearly 100% of their sales). Other farms either did not know how much food they sold in the West Island, or sold less than half of their produce in the West Island. In many cases this was due to the farm's business model, or their distance from the West Island territory.

Wholesale: About half of surveyed farms did business with wholesalers. Those who did not cited the size of their farm as being a barrier to business with wholesalers. Smaller farms do not have the agricultural output necessary to meet the demands of wholesalers, who often buy large quantities of food in bulk. One farmer mentioned that his farm had since stopped doing business with wholesalers because they were the only party making a profit from that business transaction. That farmer, and others who do not sell to wholesalers, have found that direct sale to consumers is more profitable and efficient for their purposes.

Production Capacity: Most farms surveyed indicated that they had sufficient labour for cultivation, and that their production was at capacity. Some smaller farms mentioned that they did not have enough money to hire staff, but that they could use more labour to cultivate harvests. Most farms also indicated that they were making full use of the land on their farms. Of the farms that delivered food to points of sale (just over half of farms surveyed did this), most indicated that their vehicles were at capacity in terms of food space.

Food Waste: All farms surveyed indicated that they went to great lengths in order to limit the amount of food waste they produce. When surplus yields do arise, all farms indicated that they have methods to use the surplus sustainably. For example, one smaller farm mentioned that its surpluses were used to feed livestock, which is also raises. However, the vast majority of farms were engaged in some form of charitable partnership with food banks in Montreal, or its surrounding areas. Some organizations mentioned were: Moisson Sud-Ouest, Bread Basket, NDG Food Depot, and a variety of other food banks in Lachine, Vaudreuil, and Valleyfield.

Food Distribution and Sale

Food Retailers

Food retailers are the principal location at which consumers are purchasing their food. Most of these food retail sales occur at supermarket chains (Dupont & L'Italien, 2013). Just three food retailers control roughly 70% of food sales in Québec, namely Metro Inc., Sobey's/IGA, and Loblaws/Provigo. These companies also own other food retail stores, including supermarkets and dépanneurs, which may explain their large share of the food retail market. In the West Island, these supermarket chains represent an important part of the food retail landscape. Below are the major players in the food retail space, including the stores that they own, listed beneath them.

- Metro Inc.
 - 3 Metro locations (Beaconsfield, Kirkland, and Pointe-Claire)
 - 2 Super C locations (Kirkland and Pierrefonds)
 - 1 Adonis location (Dollard-des-Ormeaux)
 - 1 Marché Richelieu location (Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue)
- Loblaws
 - 3 Provigo locations (Baie-D'Urfé, Kirkland, and Pierrefonds)
 - 3 Maxi locations (Dorval, Pierrefonds, and Pointe-Claire)
- Sobey's
 - 6 IGA locations (Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Dorval, Île-Bizard, Kirkland, Pointe-Claire and Roxboro)

[MAP OF GROCERY STORES]

Of these large chains, only IGA has locations owned by independent grocers who operate under the IGA banner. Metro and Provigo stores, along with their subsidiaries, are corporately owned and controlled (MAPAQ, 2008). The dominance of supermarket chains in the West Island is important for addressing food security in the region. As the presence of independently-owned grocery stores declines and that of large-scale supermarket chains increases, it becomes more difficult for food producers to penetrate the food market. This is because independent grocers will typically have more latitude of choice with regard to the food items they choose to put on the shelves compared with corporate-owned stores (MAPAQ, 2008).

With regard to fresh produce, supermarket chains have increasingly entered into direct business dealings with food producers, and have created distribution centers dedicated to the storage and transportation of fresh produce. Some food producers, for their part, have also begun to take up intermediary roles such as refrigeration, delivery and packaging, which were previously done by third parties (AGÉCO, 2007).

Large retailers will often decide to purchase from producers that they know will provide regular volumes of produce of reliable quality (AGÉCO, 2007). The retail standards will often make it difficult for smaller producers to penetrate the mass market, since they are unable to grow enough produce to meet the needs of retailers. As demonstrated in the previous section, many

farms in the West Island have opted not to do business with supermarkets for precisely this reason.

Central Market

The Central Market has traditionally been a place for Montreal's peri-urban producers to sell their produce to buyers on the island. Producers will arrive with trucks of produce and negotiate prices with interested buyers. These buyers are often smaller retailers, wholesalers, and representatives from hotels and restaurants. The Central Market thus acts as a place where producers can get their produce to market without having to go through larger retailers (AGÉCO, 2007).

The Central Market, however, has lost its importance over the years. As the major grocery chains have become their own wholesalers and distributors, they have had little need for a Central Market (AGÉCO, 2007). The Central Market has also relocated further east to the Saint-Michel neighbourhood of Montreal as of 2018 (La Presse, 2018). This greater distance from the West Island may have an impact on local businesses that buy produce from Central Market producers.

Wholesalers and Distributors

Wholesalers are the intermediary actors between the producers and retailers. Wholesalers will often purchase food from producers in large quantities and store it before transporting it to retailers. Wholesalers tend to be either corporate-owned or independently-owned.

Corporate wholesalers will supply their own stores where the sale of food takes place. For example, the major food retailers in Quebec, which include Sobey's/IGA, Loblaws/Provigo, and Metro Inc., are the suppliers and distributors for their own stores (AGÉCO, 2007).

Neighborhood Food Markets

There are a variety of food markets in the West Island. Many of them serve particular communities all year round. Many of the producers surveyed in this report sell their produce at West Island food markets. Below are two examples of food markets that serve different parts of the West Island.

Marché Ste-Anne

Located in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Marché Ste-Anne hosts over 40 vendors and receives approximately 1500 visitors every weekend. The market is open most of the year. Of the vendors present at Marché Ste-Anne, several are fruit and vegetable producers located in the West Island. The market also hosts vendors of baked goods, coffees, teas, meats, eggs, and cheeses.

According to the market's website, there are currently seven producers of fruits and vegetables that sell produce at the market. They are found in the following table:

Farm	Location
L'Anse au Sable	Île-Perrot
Ferme de la Rive	Rigaud
Quinn Farm	Île-Perrot
Ferme de l'Île de Montréal	Senneville
Les Jardins Carya	Senneville
Jardins Normandeau	Beauharnois
McGill Student Ecological Gardens	Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue

A-Ma-Baie Solidarity Market

A partnership between the city of Pierrefonds-Roxboro, Bread Basket, Vert Cité and Éco-Quartier, Cloverdale Multi-Ressources, and Maxi Pierrefonds, this solidarity market offers produce to vulnerable populations at whatever price they are willing to pay. The market focuses primarily on ensuring that people have access to healthy and affordable food rather than prioritizing profit. Suggested prices for produce is listed, but market-goers are still free to “pay what they can.” The market purchases usable produce that would normally go to waste from Maxi Pierrefonds and Jardins Carya in Senneville at a reduced price.

The borough of Pierrefonds-Roxboro is responsible for the market setup, Vert Cité/Éco-Quartier coordinate market operations, and Bread Basket is responsible for procuring produce. Bread Basket approached the Maxi in Pierrefonds because it was known to be community-oriented in its approach and sought to reduce its food waste. Maxi Pierrefonds has a warehouse in Boucherville that alerts the store when there is a surplus of produce, which it then sells to Bread Basket at the cost of production (which means that Maxi does not profit from this exchange). A similar arrangement exists with Jardins Carya. Bread Basket has even been able to procure some produce for free.

The market involves a great deal of physical resources and time, which present some barriers to an effectively coordinated market that supplies fresh produce from partnered suppliers every week. However, the “pay what you can” model has succeeded, and the organizers explain that the market breaks even despite variation in what citizens are able to pay.

Engaging Distributors and Retailers

As part of this portrait, the CRC reached out to four food distributors who operate in the West Island and within Montreal. These distributors are: Gordon Food Service, Sysco, Dubé Loiselle, and AlimPlus, as well as smaller distributors such as Beauvais Ltée, Groupe Phoenicia, MC Produce, and Mathilda Import. The CRC was interested in learning more about the distribution routes of these companies, whether or not their delivery vehicles were at capacity, as well as

their level of interest in partnering with local food organizations. All distributors either declined to answer questions related to this portrait, or did not respond to requests for comment.

The CRC also reached out to several corporate grocery store chains, as these stores represent a large share of all food retailers in the West Island. Specifically, the CRC was interested in learning more about methods for dealing with food waste at these stores, including whether or not these stores were partnered with any local food security organizations. Management at these stores did not seem to have the time to respond to our questions, and when they did have the time, they redirected our requests to the corporate office of their store.

Existing Food Waste Measures Among Major Food Retailers

Although food retailers did not respond to our survey, they are involved in charitable giving to food security organizations. Metro Inc., for example, is partnered with the Food Banks of Québec organization, and has committed \$500,000 to this organization. Loblaws and Sobey’s did not respond to requests for comment on their charitable activities, but there is limited information publicly available on their websites. All three major Québec food retailers are donors to Moisson Montréal. Metro Inc. and Loblaws contribute upwards of 250,000 kg of food per year to Moission Montréal.

As part of this report, the CRC compiled a list of speciality and ethnic food stores in the West Island. This list was created with information from Food Justice & Sustainability, which possesses a list of *all* establishments in the West Island that sell food products. Using this list, the CRC asked Moission Montréal if any of the stores listed were currently donors of the organization. Moission Montréal responded that none of the stores listed were donors, but that they would be interested in accepting new partners in the West Island. Therefore, the community sector may consider facilitating a dialogue between smaller food retailers and Moission Montréal. It may also find it useful to approach these smaller retailers themselves, in order to limit the amount of transportation and logistics involved in getting food to vulnerable populations. This does not guarantee that these stores will be willing to partner with the community sector, but it does present an avenue of opportunity. The list of stores is included in the table below:

STORE	LOCATION
Marche Go Organique	Kirkland
Aliments Best Nuts	Dollard-des-Ormeaux
Aliments Naturels Health Three	Dollard-des-Ormeaux
Marche Jai Jalaram (La Ferme Singh)	Dollard-des-Ormeaux
Sheng Tai	Dollard-des-Ormeaux
Marche Arizona	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Marche Victoria A.D.P.	Pierrefonds-Roxboro

Marche West Island	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Aliments Naturels Et Bio Tau	Pointe-Claire
Marche West Island	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Euromarche De L'ouest De L'ile	Dollard-des-Ormeaux
Marche Go	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Fruits Nevada	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Euro Mix	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Marche Akhavan	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Les Aliments En Vrac Papillon	Pointe-Claire
Marche Jaffna Fruits	Pierrefonds-Roxboro
Marche Epicure	Pointe-Claire

Food Waste Management

All ten municipalities of the West Island offer programs that allow citizens to dispose of organic food waste. All municipalities in the West of Montreal transport their organic waste to Raylobec, a transshipment company in Vaudreuil, where the waste is transferred to high-capacity trucks. The waste is then transported to Mironor, a company in Brownsburg-Chatham that specializes in on-site composting of organic waste. Once the food waste is transformed into compost, it is sold to agricultural producers.

West Island Municipality Populations (2016)

City	Population
Baie D'Urfé	3,900
Beaconsfield	19,801
Dollard-des-Ormeaux (DDO)	50,789
Dorval	19,426
Île-Bizard-Sainte-Genève	19,123
Kirkland	21,270
Pierrefonds-Roxboro	72,399
Pointe-Claire	31,898
Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue	4,980
Senneville	929
TOTAL	244,515

Source: Portrait 2016 des matières résiduelles de l'agglomération de Montréal, 2016.

*Shading indicates that the municipality is a borough of Montréal

Organic Waste Recuperation by Municipality (2016)

City	Quantity of Waste Collected (in tons)	Rate of Collection (%)	Collection Ratio (kg/person/year)
Baie D'Urfé	513	38%	132
Beaconsfield	4,052	66%	205
Dollard-des-Ormeaux (DDO)	3,813	33%	75

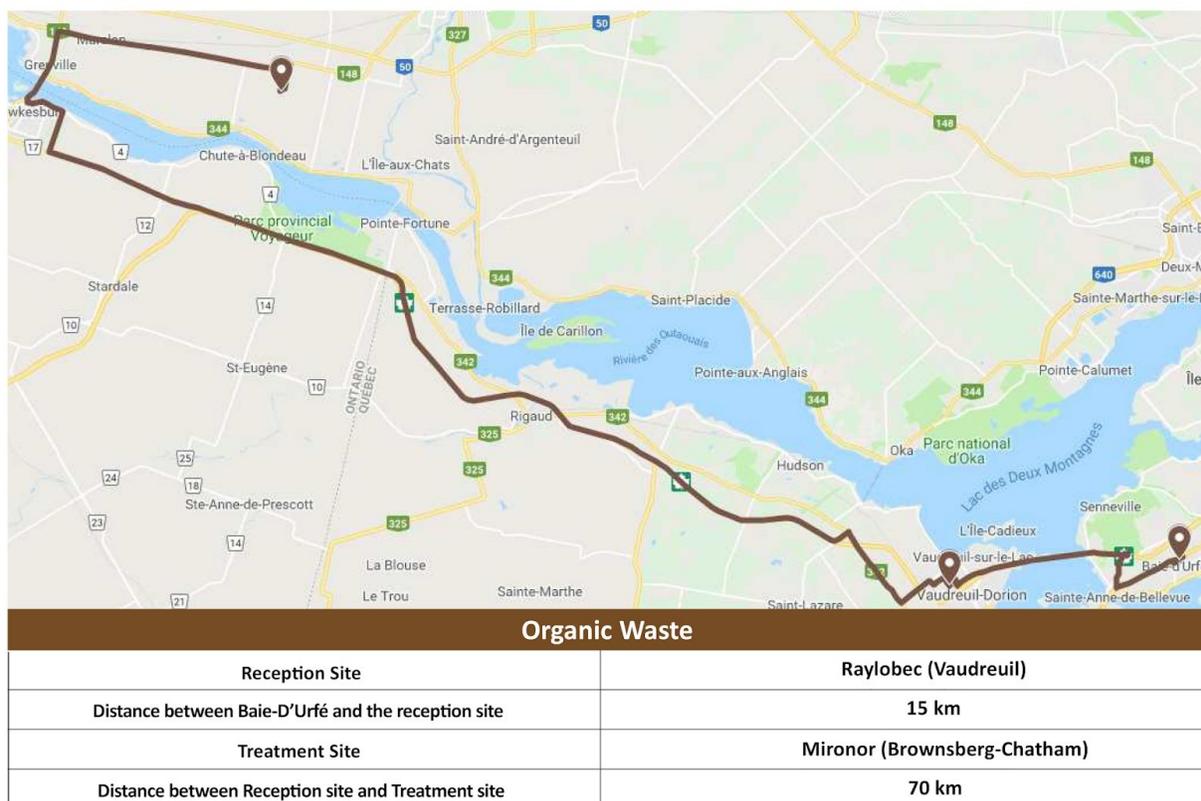
Dorval	1,546	37%	80
Île-Bizard-Sainte-Genève	1,281	28%	67
Kirkland	2,852	53%	134
Pierrefonds-Roxboro	2,379	17%	33
Pointe-Claire	4,483	55%	141
Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue	400	34%	80
Senneville	234	65%	251
TOTAL	21, 553		

Source: Portrait 2016 des matières résiduelles de l'agglomération de Montréal, 2016.

*Shading indicates that the municipality is a borough of Montréal

**Figures include green waste, which is collected with organic food waste

Visual Representation of Transportation of Food Waste



Conclusions and Points of Intervention

This portrait of the food system sought to give an overview of the food system in the West Island in order to better understand how food is grown, distributed, sold, and disposed of. Using this information, the CRC hoped to identify points of intervention where the community sector may be able to address the issue of food insecurity in the West Island.

Lack of Research on the West Island

Understanding the food system in the West Island was made difficult considering the fact that most of the literature about agriculture and food distribution is analyzed at the provincial or city level. There was no literature that focused on the West Island alone. In fact, there is a significant lack of literature concerning food markets and community groups in most neighbourhoods west of the downtown area (Faim “Zéro,” 2018). The lack of literature may not be of great importance because there is likely no significant difference between how the West Island supplies itself with food, and how the rest of Montreal supplies itself with food. That said, a better understanding of the needs and dynamics of *specific* local players will require greater research, and likely a more comprehensive research team than this general report allowed for.

Priorities of Food Producers

Based on our survey results, small farms in the West Island are not overwhelmingly interested in selling to supermarkets or independently-owned grocery stores. These farms’ operations are too small-scale to be attractive for these retailers because they tend to prefer consistency and volumes. Furthermore, beyond the farms who had a social/community development mandate, most food producers are concerned with turning a profit, and do not have food insecurity on their radar. As a result, the community sector can try to find ways to support market development opportunities for farmers to provide food directly to consumers.

It is also the case that food producers have many concerns over the use of the limited agricultural land on the island of Montreal. Specifically, many producers worry that land is too expensive and scarce, and that the permanent agriculture zone land is not being responsibly protected and developed. If the community sector wishes to partner with producers in the fight against food insecurity, it may find it worth exploring how the sector can be of help to producers in addressing these concerns. An important place to start is to advocate for land preservation and increased access to land in the agricultural zone, as well as partner with local farms to create more marketing opportunities for their produce in the West Island.

Although this portrait reached out to fourteen producers that grow or sell food in the West Island, we cannot be certain that our list of producers is exhaustive. Because organizations like MAPAQ and UPA could not provide lists of farms due to concerns over privacy violations, this portrait relied heavily on existing lists of farms from the CRC or from Food Justice & Sustainability. A more thorough investigation of the networks and organizations of producers should be undertaken in order to bring in the perspectives of as many actors as possible.

Outreach to Food Retailers

Fourthly, both the distributors and the grocery store chains we contacted were not responsive to our requests for comment, making it difficult to understand what the charitable activities of individual stores are. In many instances, local stores would redirect us to corporate head offices, which would, in turn, redirect us back to stores, or stop responding to our requests. However, based on existing charitable activities from certain local grocery stores (ex. Maxi Pierrefonds donating to the A-Ma-Baie Solidarity Market), we understand local grocers to be potential partners in the fight against food insecurity.

Therefore, if the community sector wishes to engage corporate food retailers, I would advise against contacting these companies through the top of their corporate structure, as I have found that answers to my requests often went unanswered, or else I was redirected to other individuals in the corporate structure. A-Ma-Baie Solidarity Market has found success in cold-calling local food retailers directly, and the process could be further advanced if the community sector has contacts that work for local food retailers that could facilitate dialogue with that store.

Opportunities in Addressing Food Waste

From the perspective of food waste, there are no major points of intervention once the food has been consumed and is being transported to a compost center. The community sector may advocate for better food disposal methods, but this would not directly address food insecurity. Where the issue of food waste presents an opportunity for intervention is where agricultural producers and retailers have surpluses of food. As this report has demonstrated, producers are interested in reducing food waste, and often donate surpluses to food banks. Therefore, there is, among producers, a very real desire to work with food security organizations in order to limit food waste, which could be an avenue worth pursuing.

Food retailers are also very proud of their food waste reduction measures. Many such measures, as mentioned in this report, are somewhat geared toward making food more affordable for everyday consumers. There is thus an opportunity for the community sector to partner with *individual and/or independent* stores in order to gear their food reduction methods toward addressing food insecurity in their communities. The community sector should also consider reaching out to smaller, independently-owned non-chain grocery stores, and/or specialty food stores. Any retailer that has a connection to their community may be interested in working with the community sector.

The Limits of Community Action

The West Island's food system is an object worthy of further study in order to understand how the community sector can be a helpful partner. The food system is a vast and complex topic that may, in many ways, be beyond the reach of the community sector to fundamentally change. Many actors in the food system have profit as their main goal, and give to food security organizations where they can. Therefore, it is difficult to address the problem of food insecurity outside of a food system that follows the profit motive above all else. As a result, the community sector will need to rely on charitable partnerships with farms and grocery stores in order to achieve the greatest impact in addressing food insecurity.

Appendix A: Survey Tool for Farmers

Farm name: _____ Phone #: _____

Location: _____ Name of Contact: _____

My name is [NAME], and I'm working with [ORGANIZATION]. We're currently doing research on food producers in [REGION], and I was wondering if you had 5 minutes to briefly answer a few questions?

1. Do you sell your produce to supermarket chains in [REGION]? **YES / NO**
2. Do you sell your produce to specialty grocery stores in [REGION]? **YES / NO**
3. Do you sell your produce at farmer's markets? **YES / NO**
4. Do you offer direct-to-consumer food baskets? **YES / NO**
5. Do you sell your produce at farm stands? **YES / NO**
6. Do you deliver your own food? **YES / NO**
 - a. If so, where do you deliver your food?
 - b. What kind of vehicle do you use to deliver it?
 - c. Is the food delivered in your vehicle at capacity? **YES / NO**
7. Are you interested in selling to wholesalers? **YES / NO**
8. Do you know the percentage of your produce is sold within [REGION]? _____
9. Is your food production at capacity? **YES / NO**
10. Do you have sufficient labour to cultivate your produce? **YES / NO**
11. Do you have surpluses of specific crops, and if so, when?
 - a. What do you do with the surpluses of these crops?

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