

# Fostering food

## Researchers creating toolkit to help communities develop sustainable food hubs

BY ANTHONY NGAI

**W**ith today's growing interest in the local food movement and in creating more sustainable food systems, community-based food hubs can play an important role in ensuring that Ontarians have access to fresh, safe, tasty and affordable foods.

Food hubs are collaborative partnerships built up over a number of years among community groups, government, producers, retailers and residents working to strengthen a community's food infrastructure. They currently exist in places such as Toronto, Guelph, London and Waterloo Region.

But not all communities in Ontario have the same level of support when it comes to building strong food systems. Realizing this, Prof. Karen Landman from the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development and a province-wide research team are creating a toolkit to

assist communities in building their own successful food hubs, while understanding unique barriers that each community faces and how to overcome them.

"We want to help rebuild the local infrastructure between farms and consumers to create a sustainable, healthy and fair food system," she says.

According to studies by the American National Good Food Network, healthier communities and food hubs go hand in hand. People inside the hubs also have more access to fresh and affordable foods, as well as a stronger, more close-knit relationship with local producers.

Although food hubs have taken hold in more resource-rich regions of Ontario, many rural communities across the province face barriers in setting up the proper infrastructure for an efficient and sustainable food hub.

Landman says some barriers can stem from the communities' geographic location or from the lack of community capacity.

The researchers are aiming to bring down these barriers with their toolkit, to reflect the best practices and successes certain communities have experienced and how they can be adapted to others.

Community members will be able to use the toolkit by learning from other models about practices that build capacity and reflect local resources.

"This toolkit will help Ontarians to have improved access to local, fresh, nutritious foods, while sustaining the economy and environment," says Landman.

The researchers plan to present a prototype of the toolkit at upcoming local food and urban agriculture conferences. There, it will be critiqued and fine-tuned, in hopes that it can be improved to work equally well for different communities across Ontario. **R**

■ Collaborators include Prof. Alison Blay-Palmer from Wilfrid Laurier University as well as a team of faculty members and students across the province. The project involves collaboration with non-governmental organizations, four provincial government offices and an international partner located in the United Kingdom.

■ Funding for this project is provided by the OMAFRA—U of G Partnership. Additional funding is provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

## New user-friendly website makes research accessible

**T**he OMAFRA—U of G Partnership generates a wealth of new knowledge every year. One of the best ways to get that information to users is electronically...and now that knowledge transfer is being mobilized more than ever, thanks to the redesigned partnership website.

The website's user-friendly interface, customized search and easy navigational features help get science out of the lab and into the hands of those who need it.

With participation from

OMAFRA's Research and Innovation Branch, four partnership websites have been redesigned and brought under one umbrella for easier access to information and research results.

"The new site showcases what we have already done and highlights the capacity of what the partnership will help us achieve next," says Rich Moccia, associate vice-president, research (strategic partnerships).

The website provides real-time access to research results and

the latest agri-food and rural research information. Other innovative features include Knowledge Translation and Transfer instructional videos, a calendar of events and highlights of how OMAFRA—U of G Partnership research is making an impact.

As well, users can now access the site from their smartphone and tablet.

Check out the new website at [www.uoguelph.ca/omafra\\_partnership](http://www.uoguelph.ca/omafra_partnership)

—Katharine Tuerke



# hubs FOR THE FUTURE

Prof. Karen Landman is creating a toolkit that will help rural communities across Ontario build up strong local food supply chains.