

# HIDDEN HARVEST



## A Case Study

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based on participant observation and interviews

with

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founders of Hidden Harvest Ottawa



Centre for  
Sustainable  
Food Systems



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The Social Economy of Food:  
Informal, under-recognized contributions to  
Community prosperity and resilience



## Executive Summary



“The pursuit of economic viability has led the social enterprise to form unique and meaningful partnerships with local food processors and other businesses in a move to secure a more stable form of income.”

Hidden Harvest is a for-profit social enterprise that aims to legitimize and support the practice of harvesting fruits and nuts in urban areas. The organization has developed a model through which to increase access to—and availability of—fresh, healthful foods hyper-locally in Ottawa, as people harvest from their own (or nearby) neighborhoods. People volunteer to collect fruits from trees on municipal and privately-owned lands made available to the organization. The food collected is then shared within the local community: half of the harvest goes to the nearest food agency, and the

remainder is divided up equally among volunteers, homeowners and Hidden Harvest. The portion retained by Hidden Harvest is given to local food processors in exchange for a portion of either the value-added product or the profit.

Its for-profit model distinguishes Hidden Harvest from other similar urban gleaning and harvest organizations in that they ultimately aim to create a self-sustaining business model that does not rely on external funding. The pursuit of economic viability has led the social enterprise to form unique and meaningful partnerships with local food processors and other businesses in a move to secure a more stable form of income. However, as a social enterprise, Hidden Harvest generates profits that are intended to benefit as many people as possible. Harvest events and outreach activities aim to enhance community food security and sovereignty, local ecologies and economies. Although the organization still relies on grant funding to operate, their ability to innovate and develop networks has enabled them to grow and develop distinct ties and networks in Ottawa.



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## Project Overview

Hidden Harvest, a for-profit social enterprise based in the Ottawa Valley, rescues fruits and nuts from trees located on private and public lands. Hidden Harvest aims to create a self-sustaining business model to build public capacity and knowledge to access fresh, healthful food in their own neighborhoods. Although still relatively new, Hidden Harvest has experienced significant growth, and corresponding challenges, since its initial inception. Co-founders Jay Garlough and Katrina Siks partnered in 2011 to act upon their concern over the large amounts of unused food produced by trees and vines in the City of Ottawa. While people have unofficially collected fruits from trees on private and public lands in the area, the co-founders wanted to legitimize, formalize and popularize the practice. Upon realizing that no organization existed with the sole purpose of rescuing nuts and fruits in Ottawa, Garlough and Siks put their plan for Hidden Harvest into action, securing local partners and funding. In 2012, the first official harvest took place, and there have been approximately 387 harvest events held since then (i.e., as of January 2017).



## Geographic Context

Hidden Harvest operates within the National Capital Region, with the majority of harvests taking place in the urban and suburban neighborhoods of Ottawa. More recently, the organization has expanded the geographic scope of harvest events to better include the rural areas located in and beyond the Greenbelt, such as the communities of Perth and Manotick. Equally, harvests occasionally take place across the Ottawa River in Québec, mainly in the Hull sector of the City of Gatineau. However, the prevalence of the French language in Gatineau has proven to be a barrier for the co-founders to expand the scope of Hidden Harvest to fully include Québec, as they do not have the capacity to approach francophone homeowners and city officials effectively, or ensure that front-line volunteers and systems are fully bilingual.

## Project Resources

### Human Resources

As co-founders, Garlough and Siks act as the primary coordinators of Hidden Harvest. They share responsibility in tasks related to administration, volunteer and event coordination, outreach and social media, and building community partnerships. Siks has extensive experience working with community and environmental organizations as well as social enterprises, and Garlough (who has a background in technology and project management) comes from a long line of farmers – in fact, he grew up on a dairy farm.

Presently, the co-founders are employed full-time outside of their work with Hidden Harvest, which has therefore become a part-time endeavour for each of them. As a result, they have had to divest a number of the day-to-day managerial and administrative tasks to two part-time, paid employees, and also opted to include more voices in the overall direction of the enterprise. In the fall of 2016, they hired a part-time Harvest Coordinator to oversee the online harvest invitation system, social media, and event coordination. Hidden Harvest also has a lead neighborhood leader (euphemistically known as the ‘Lead Squirrel’), who is responsible for training volunteer leaders, supporting harvest events, and maintaining partnerships with local food agencies.

Hidden Harvest relies on volunteers to coordinate harvest events and pick the fruit. ‘Neighborhood leaders’ coordinate with property owners and organize harvests; in turn, they are provided with training on tree identification and best practices regarding food safety. ‘Harvesters’ make up the majority of volunteers, and anyone can sign up on the Hidden Harvest website to become a volunteer and receive invitations to sign up for harvest events. The enterprise estimates that they now have around 1080 active volunteers in their database.

## Physical Infrastructure

Hidden Harvest relies on very little physical infrastructure since the majority of managerial operations are conducted online—to reduce overhead costs (and, as a result of limited human resources). Harvest event invitations are created and sent out through Eventbrite, the web-based management system. Harvest equipment in the form of pole fruit pickers, sheets to catch fruit, ladders, and signs are provided to the neighborhood leaders, who are responsible for bringing and setting up equipment, as needed, prior to each harvest. Often, homeowners will make available difficult-to-transport equipment, such as ladders, as many harvest leaders attend harvests by bicycle. Harvest volunteers may bring their own bags or containers to collect their share of fruit, though the harvest leader makes sure that appropriate containers are on hand—both for volunteers and for food to be donated to food agencies. Partnerships with local food agencies allow for use of refrigerated trucks to transport fruit, as well as access to kitchen facilities in which to run food preparation and preservation workshops.

## Financial and Community Resources

As a for-profit social enterprise, Hidden Harvest ultimately seeks to create a means to sustain their activities without having to depend on external funding. While current operations still require support through grants and donations, the enterprise has also developed creative and innovative means of generating revenue through their community partnerships.

## Municipal Government

In order to harvest on city-owned property, Hidden Harvest has had to work closely with the municipal government to secure the appropriate permits. In seeing the social and ecological benefits of the work done by Hidden Harvest, the City has opted to waive the fees for the permits, which would otherwise have cost approximately \$260 per harvest per year - a significant cost considering that, in 2016, they held 80 harvest events. The municipal government also benefits from this arrangement, as they aim to promote Ottawa as a 'Green City'. To this end, city officials cite Hidden Harvest as a means to reduce waste and enhance food security.

## Federal Government

Hidden Harvest recently received funding from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) by way of the Agricultural Youth Green Jobs Initiative, which provides organizations with 50% matching funds to hire youth (post-secondary students or recent graduates under 30 years of age) to work on environmentally-oriented sustainability projects in the agricultural sector. This support allowed Hidden Harvest to employ the part-time Harvest Coordinator.







Figure 1: A Parkdale Food Centre van at a harvest event.

### Parkdale Food Centre

With the support of a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Parkdale Food Centre partnered with Hidden Harvest to develop programming to allow low-income individuals to participate in harvest events more easily. The Parkdale Food Centre is a volunteer-run non-profit organization that not only serves as a food bank but also provides nutrition and food skills education.

### Partnering with Local Businesses

The governmental grants that Hidden Harvest receives only cover a portion of the necessary expenses needed to maintain operations. As such, the co-founders forged partnerships with local businesses that have enabled them to acquire financial support as well as market the Hidden Harvest brand and cause. Larger, locally-owned-and-operated businesses in the Ottawa area have contributed direct financial support to Hidden Harvest through donations, including: Bridgehead Coffee (a fair trade organic,



Ottawa-based coffee chain); VrtuCar (a car sharing business); and Beau's All Natural Brewing Co. (a regional craft brewery located in the Ottawa Valley). In 2014, Bridgehead Coffee created a coffee blend bearing the Hidden Harvest name and logo, with a portion of the proceeds—\$1 per pound of coffee sold, or just under \$4000 in total—donated to Hidden Harvest. Beau's All Natural Brewing Co. provides significant donations through their annual Oktoberfest held at their brewery in Vankleek Hill. There, Hidden Harvest organizes a 'Midway' games area on the grounds to garner donations from event attendees. And, in a related show of support, VrtuCar provided vehicles for Hidden Harvest to use at the Oktoberfest event this year.

Hidden Harvest also developed arrangements with local, small-scale food processors, namely: Top Shelf Preserves, Lowertown Canning Company, Michael Dolce Jams, Ashton Naturals, and Bicycle Craft Brewery. In each case, these select processors receive a portion of harvested fruits and nuts, and in exchange, supply Hidden Harvest with either a portion of the products made with Hidden Harvest fruits, or a share of the profits from these products. Often, these value-added processors will use the Hidden Harvest name and/or logo on their products, which provides the social enterprise with marketing impact as well as income.

## Rescuing Fruit and Nuts: The Hidden Harvest Model

Diverse fruit and nut tree species, native and introduced, are a part of Ottawa's urban landscape, and their role in enhancing local ecologies and food systems have been largely unrecognized. Fruit trees are intentionally planted on privately- and publically-owned lands, and occasionally crop up naturally at the fringes of city parks and/or on abandoned lots. Despite the bounty of fresh and healthful foods these trees offer, most often, their fruits and nuts are left un-harvested—to be eaten by animals, or to decompose, but with a good portion of the food ultimately going to waste. Many homeowners lack the capacity and/or time to harvest trees on their land, and the un-harvested fruit and nut trees are sometime cut down as they become labeled a nuisance—attracting animals and insects, and posing a slipping hazard from fruit rotting on sidewalks. Fruit that has fallen on roadways and sidewalks is usually dealt with by residents, or else removed through normal street-sweeping operations. The fruit on City-owned trees is simply treated as waste, and is typically mulched during grass-cutting operations by maintenance staff and left in place as 'natural compost'.

Hidden Harvest attempts to alter the ways in which food trees are valued in urban environments by creating a legitimate means to collect and distribute the fruits and nuts produced. The enterprise works to identify and catalogue city- and privately-owned trees that, with permission, they harvest when the produce is ripe, to share within the local community. Homeowners sign up their trees to be harvested through the Hidden



Harvest website, and city-owned trees are identified through a tree inventory that the municipal government began creating in 2009, and released through an Open Data initiative in 2012. Volunteers are also encouraged to spread the word about Hidden Harvest by printing materials that are freely available through their website, and distributing to homeowners in their neighborhood who have fruit and nuts trees on their property, or posting in public places.

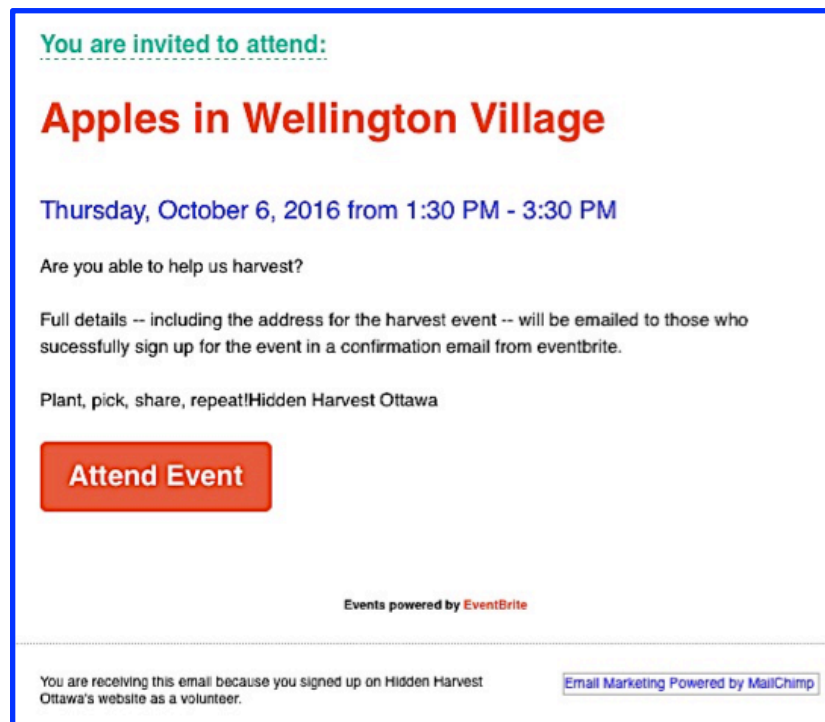


Figure 2: Volunteers receive e-mail invitations for a Harvest event, such as this one, indicating the date, time, and species to be harvested.

Neighborhood leaders organize the harvests, first identifying when fruit will be ready to be harvested, and then coordinating with property owners to plan the event. Once a time and date are secured, the neighborhood leader creates an event invitation, listing the species to be harvested, event time and a general locale, permitting volunteers to sign up and receive the exact address of the tree. At the harvests, neighborhood leaders ensure that the harvest equipment, including ladders, bags and pole harvesters, is available and that the site is free of hazards, such as rotting fruit beneath the tree. As volunteers arrive, they are given instructions on the appropriate harvesting techniques and basic food safety guidelines. While Hidden Harvest does not need to adhere to formal regulations, the enterprise adopted a set of best practices that conform to the

needs of the food agencies they work with. These include not collecting windfall (food that has fallen on the ground that might potentially be contaminated with bacteria) for donated shares<sup>1</sup>, discarding rotten and bug eaten fruits, and storing food to meet food safety standards (refrigeration). Hidden Harvest also uses a decision-making tool drafted by Toronto Public Health, designed to help determine and mitigate the risks of potentially contaminated soils, such as those belonging to former landfill sites, when growing food in urban areas (Hidden Harvest, 2012b). Based on these guidelines, Hidden Harvest notes the risks to fruits and nuts produced by trees remain minimal – as biological processes in contaminated soils prevent contaminants from reaching the fruit (Hidden Harvest, 2012b).

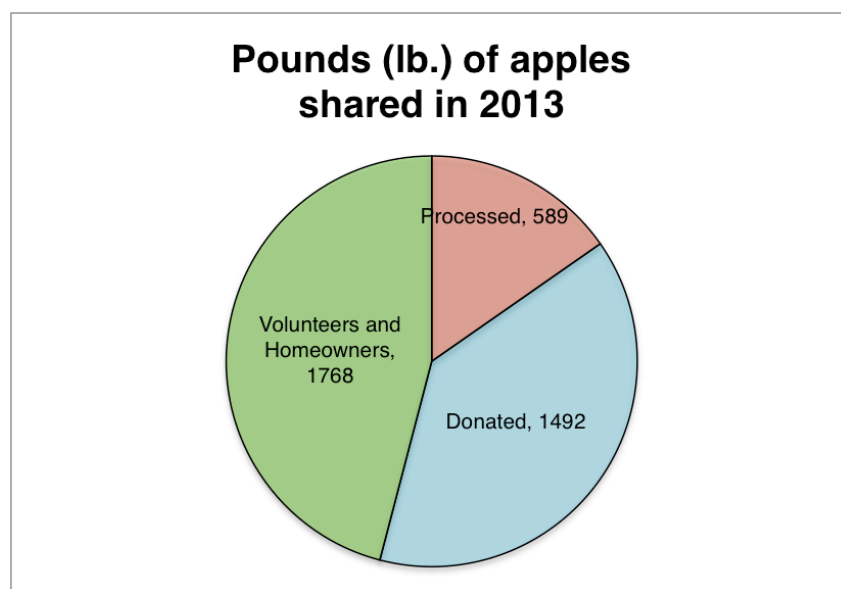


Figure 3: The approximate division of the 3,849 lb. of apples harvested in 2013 between volunteers and homeowners, food agencies (donated), and Hidden Harvest (processed).

During the event, the neighborhood leader provides guidance and assistance to harvesters, and then weighs, records and divvies up the collected fruits between the homeowner, the volunteers and a food agency of the leader's choosing (Figure 3). Hidden Harvest may also retain a quarter share of the fruit collected to share with a local food processor, if the amount and type of fruit can be put to good use. A harvest event normally lasts approximately two hours, from set up to clean up, and most events take place in the later summer months and into the fall as fruits come to ripen. Hidden

<sup>1</sup> Volunteers may bring home any windfall (and fruits that have been on the ground during the harvest) at their own risk.





Harvest's peak season is from May until October, and the quieter winter months are used to plan and train volunteers for the next season.

## **Building Adaptive Capacity**

### **Economic Resilience**

As a social enterprise, Hidden Harvest aims to create a sustainable means of garnering an income to support harvest activities and, eventually, become profitable. Profit, for the organization, is defined as a financial return based on the goods and services provided to society. In this, Siks explained that the pursuit of profit can have community-minded intentions: Hidden Harvest aspires to generate 'profit for everyone' and realize social and ecological good. While profit is often thought of as negative, achieved through the exploitation of others, Hidden Harvest attempts to reframe the idea of profit as benefiting multiple actors: the organization aims to provide its employees with an adequate and secure living while sustaining its operations, and to benefit community members through enhanced socio-economic and ecological resilience. Siks also notes that Hidden Harvest strives to secure economic viability – an ongoing challenge for social enterprises, many of which depend on external funding and operate at a loss. She posits the ideal that good work should generate good pay: people who engage in work that benefits the wider community should be afforded a living wage.

As previously stated, while Hidden Harvest currently relies on external funding, their other, and innovative, means of generating income have allowed the enterprise to share economic benefits with community members and partners. In particular, partnerships with food agencies and processors have decreased dependence on the cash economy through donation and bartering practices. For instance, fruit donated to the Parkdale Food Centre is often used in their Muesli social enterprise (Thirteen Muesli), which helps to offset the cost of purchasing fruit wholesale. Bartering, or non-monetary exchange of goods or services, occurs when food processors receive Hidden Harvest fruit in exchange for a portion of the profits and/or marketing for the organization. These partnerships allow small-scale processors to access locally-harvested fresh fruits and nuts, enabling them to tell a rich and locally embedded story to their consumers about where the fruit comes from.

A social return on investment (SROI) tool allows Hidden Harvest to estimate the value of the fruit harvested, with wholesale prices applied to fruits donated and given to food agencies and processors, and the retail costs applied to fruits kept by volunteers<sup>2</sup>. The SROI also allows for Hidden Harvest to achieve their goals of financial transparency and accountability to their funders, supporters, volunteers and broader community. The SROI tool exists as a series of spreadsheets (see Appendix 1), which calculate the

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<sup>2</sup> As part of the reciprocal nature of this case study, an SROI tool was developed for Hidden Harvest.

monetary values of various activities (harvests, volunteer hours, training, etc.)—to demonstrate how the  $\frac{3}{4}$  share of each harvest which is given away free saves volunteers, home owners, food banks and municipalities real money, and outweighs the costs to deliver the program. Ultimately, the organization would like to make this data publicly available through their website, and provide real-time updates from harvest leaders as harvests are completed.



Figure 4: Neighborhood leader Tina explains to volunteers how to use a pole harvester to collect apples

## Ecological Resilience

As the City of Ottawa seeks input into its Urban Forest Management Plan<sup>3</sup>, Hidden Harvest has advocated for fruit-bearing trees to be recognized not only as a vital component of biodiversity, but also of enhanced food security. Furthermore, many studies show that a close relationship with nature—even in urban areas—is critical to maintain health, results in a reduction of healthcare costs, and bolsters citizen support for greenspace conservation<sup>4</sup>. Though an official mandate is still being drafted, city

<sup>3</sup>The city of Ottawa's urban forest management plan can be found at: <http://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/public-consultations/environment/urban-forest-management-plan>

<sup>4</sup> See "A Healthy dose of green" <http://www.forestsontario.ca/news/trees-ontario-released-a-healthy-dose-of-green-at-the-63rd-annual-ofa-conference/>



officials demonstrate support for Hidden Harvest's approach to engaging citizens with urban forests. In the case of 'nuisance' fruit and nut trees in their ward, in the past city councillors have approached Hidden Harvest rather than forestry services, out of fear the latter might remove the offending tree.

Originally, part of the organization's business model included the sale of trees to individuals as well as organizations, to promote and increase the number of fruit trees in the city. However, to generate adequate profit to support harvest activities, Hidden Harvest needed to sell thousands of trees each year. Ultimately, Garlough and Siks decided against selling trees, as it detracted from the time spent coordinating harvests and conducting outreach work. Instead, Hidden Harvest encouraged a greater valuation of trees and biodiversity in the city through their harvest work and public education, resulting in more homeowners planting fruit-bearing trees. Hidden Harvest also highlights the role of neighborhood ecosystems in contributing to local food systems. Garlough stressed the role of squirrels in promoting fruit trees in urban areas, as their foraging activities lead to fruit trees being planted on vacant lots and the edge lands of city parks. In fact, Garlough jokes that scientists study the efficacy of squirrel seed propagation, since it has proven markedly more effective than human attempts! Recognizing the critical role of different species in propagating urban fruit trees, Hidden Harvest purposefully leaves some portion of the fruit during harvest events to maintain the integrity of urban ecologies.

## Food System Resilience

Hidden Harvest's practices align with food sovereignty principles, as they allow people to have greater control over their local food system. In addition to guaranteeing basic tenets of food security, such as adequate access to and availability of healthful and culturally-appropriate foods, proponents of food sovereignty also advocate for food systems that are more localized in terms of supply chains and governance. Within the Hidden Harvest model, people in the community decide where the harvested food goes beyond the mandated half-share, which is donated to the nearest food agency. Often, participants and homeowners will donate part of (or the whole of) their share in lieu of keeping it. Donations and partnerships with local food banks not only provide low-income populations with food, but also offer the opportunity to harvest food and develop food skills through workshops. The donated fruits allow food bank clients (respectfully referred to as 'neighbours') to not compromise their dignity when accessing harvested food, particularly as many participate in the harvests themselves. Furthermore, many people don't have the ability or mobility to harvest their own fruit trees, particularly the elderly, and so the portion of fruit reserved for homeowners can be a means to increase food security.





Figure 5: Apples harvested from the Hintonburg neighborhood in Ottawa – imperfect but delicious.

For many, the harvests provide a means through which to connect with their agrarian roots and food traditions through harvesting particular fruits and nuts. Certain foods are difficult to access through conventional markets, but are nonetheless available locally. For instance, many elderly people with rural Canadian roots want to access Eastern black walnuts—something their grandparents would have eaten, but which is not readily available in stores. Similarly, people from the prairies can access Saskatoon berries, and people of Asian descent can harvest ginkgo—a traditional Asian food. The harvest events offer people the opportunity to gain access to these foods, and connect with their roots and culture. Ultimately, the work undertaken by Hidden Harvest increases people’s appreciation for food sources and mature trees in their neighborhoods, by revaluing trees as a vital source of food. Moreover, by encouraging the planting and retention of fruit-bearing trees in Ottawa, Hidden Harvest ultimately increases the availability of fresh, healthful and local foods.

## Increasing Prosperity

The enhancement of local economies through the work of Hidden Harvest is a long-term project. Much of their work directly contributes to the local economy, particularly



through the tangible economic benefits generated through partnerships with local food processors. Hidden Harvest also impacts the local economy indirectly by developing an ecologically sound, inclusive and accessible means of accessing food. This benefit is keenly demonstrated through their work to increase the food and ecological values of urban fruit trees, and create a space for low-income populations, people with disabilities, women, New Canadians, and Aboriginal people in the local food economy. While Hidden Harvest does not survey or ask for data on marginalized groups, Garlough notes that certain volunteers, after attending a few harvests, are comfortable with sharing their stories, which conveys the diverse backgrounds and experiences of participants.



*Figure 6: Many different tasks during harvest events can be made more accessible to people with mobility issues as well as young children*

Hidden Harvest also works to assign an economic value to urban fruit trees that relates to their food production value. By employing the SROI tool (see Appendix 1) and bartering practices, the social enterprise can reorient how fruit is valued based on its use as a food product. Moreover, the Hidden Harvest model ensures that harvests are accessible to a wide variety of people with varied abilities and experiences. The demographics of volunteer harvesters are varied, with a range of income-levels, genders and ages. As such, harvest events are designed to include roles available to those unable to climb ladders or use harvesting equipment. For instance, sorting the collected fruit to ensure quality and food safety (i.e. discarding rotten and bug-eaten fruits) is an activity that can be done by children as well as those with mobility issues.

To further enhance inclusivity, Hidden Harvest has developed programs with local food banks – predominantly the Parkdale Food



Centre and Dalhousie Food Cupboard – which aim to include more low-income populations in harvest activities. One of the challenges Hidden Harvest faces in being inclusive is the technology-based model on which it operates (volunteers sign up for harvests via e-mail invitation). The food bank partnerships aim to include those who may not have reliable access to a computer and Internet. Equally, for elderly people who want to participate, Hidden Harvest's lack of a phone number presents a challenge. Garlough indicated that they still receive letters from seniors wanting to participate in harvests, who are unable to sign up through the Internet event system. Due to limited resources and capacity, Hidden Harvest has yet to develop a means to connect with populations that may not have reliable Internet access, although their partnerships with food agencies help to mitigate this issue.

Even though Hidden Harvest does not actively grow food, as they only collect fruits from existing trees, some industry actors view the model as potentially problematic, including the Ontario Apple Growers, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and the produce marketing association. While Garlough notes that Hidden Harvest is not yet viewed as a competitor by virtue of its limited scale, as the enterprise grows and harvests more food, many of the commercial growers and governing bodies may push for Hidden Harvest to adhere to the same food safety regulations out of fairness. Many of these actors view the model of urban harvesting as an inefficient and illegitimate means of producing food and assuring food security, with little to no scalability. Conversely, the people participating in harvests have gained more respect for farmers and food industry workers through the experiential learning processes at harvests. They have more appreciation for what it takes to grow and harvest food, and many would consequently pay more for local foods. This suggests that Hidden Harvest can benefit local producers through their experiential learning practices that teach people about where their food comes from and what is involved in growing and harvesting it.

## Increasing Social Capital

### Creating Networks

Harvest events provide meaningful opportunities for participants to connect with people in their neighborhoods, as well as contribute to local food agencies. Hidden Harvest's activities cultivate interpersonal relationships between homeowners and neighborhood leaders, and friendships between volunteers at a local level. Prior to harvests, relationships are established between homeowners and neighborhood leaders to coordinate the harvest event when the fruits are ripe. Relations are also built between neighborhood leaders and volunteers, particularly as many will live in the same neighborhood. The very local scale of the relations is by design, as Hidden Harvest uses an algorithm to keep harvest invitations within a particular geography when they are





initially sent out to volunteers, to help build more localized social relations. The reason for this design is that people are more likely to attend a harvest nearest their residence or workplace; they are more likely to walk, bike or take public transit to the event; they are more likely to treat the property with respect, or stay a bit longer to help the neighbourhood leader clean up; and they are more likely to remain engaged with the program when discovering ‘hidden’ fruit that is close to areas they know well (“There is an apricot tree in my neighbourhood? Incredible!”). Only when more volunteers are needed will a harvest event be broadened to include more volunteers from a wider geographic scope.

Wider connections between volunteers, food agencies and local businesses are also fostered through harvest events and other knowledge-building and outreach activities. Many neighborhood leaders’ first in-person interaction with their local food bank was when they dropped off the food bank’s share of fruit. The ties to food agencies are a fundamental part of Hidden Harvest’s mandate, as neighborhood leaders come to understand the unique needs of different food agencies through the donations of fruit. Many of the workshops offered by Hidden Harvest are conducted in partnership with local food processors, and harvest volunteers become more aware of—and more likely to purchase—the products from these processors. The organization itself has close ties with processors and other businesses through their partnerships and funding arrangements.

## **Building Knowledge**

One of Hidden Harvest’s primary goals is to raise awareness of urban trees as a food source, and harvest events provide an important experiential learning opportunity through which people build their knowledge of local fruit trees. Garlough notes that participants develop ‘tree goggles’ in that they become proficient at identifying trees by appearance. As well, people learn how the fruit tastes, different ways to consume, prepare and preserve the food, and what stories describe the trees, such as Indigenous medicinal and food uses. By participating in harvest events, volunteers develop the knowledge needed to harvest and care for different fruit trees. As Hidden Harvest strives to be more culturally inclusive, efforts are being made to engage with the Aboriginal community and New Canadians. For instance, Hidden Harvest attempts to include Aboriginal stories and knowledge as part of harvest events, and to recruit and train Indigenous harvest leaders. So far, the success in these efforts has been limited, although the organization is working towards developing strategies that engage Aboriginal populations in ways that produce lasting and mutually beneficial partnerships. The social enterprise also strives to build capacity through workshops on food preparation and preservation, some of which are aimed at New Canadians who may have limited knowledge of how to prepare locally-available fruits—though, as mentioned, they may also have familiarity and expertise in harvesting and preparing non-native species that have been planted locally.



Figure 7: Volunteers sort crabapples to ensure that no rotten and bug-eaten fruits are retained.

Knowledge building opportunities for volunteers take place post-harvest as well, through workshops and advisory board meetings. The food preparation workshops are an important means to share knowledge about often underused and relatively unknown fruits and nuts that may require special skills or knowledge to prepare. While Siks and Garlough are still passionate about (and engaged with) the organization, their external commitments have limited the amount of time they can spend on day-to-day operations and outreach. As such, Hidden Harvest has moved towards a volunteer-led decision-making model, made up of core-volunteers, including advisory board members and neighborhood leaders. In engaging with a broad range of tasks and issues associated with the direction of Hidden Harvest, these volunteers have had to develop their understanding of policies that apply to urban gleaning and fruit trees, and their corresponding capacities to analyze and comment on these policies.

## Challenges

Ironically, success was identified as a possible threat for Hidden Harvest, particularly in their aspiration to become self-sufficient. The potential profitability of the social enterprise holds both positive and negative outcomes, and hosts a set of new and



distinctive challenges. Notably, Garlough remains concerned about the attention that a bigger and more profitable Hidden Harvest might attract from other food producers, funders, supporters and regulators.



*Figure 8: Sheets are used to catch falling fruit to prevent bruising and waste (fruits that have fallen on the ground cannot be donated to food agencies or used for processing).*

Currently, and for the foreseeable future, funding is essential to maintain operations. Garlough expressed concern that if the social enterprise were to start to turn a profit they might also lose the invaluable support from the city in not having to pay for permits, which would prove incredibly costly as the number of harvests increase yearly. However, should this situation ever occur, the organization has kept close records of the myriad positive citations of their operations by city officials. These records show that harvests provide strong social returns on municipal investments, particularly in supporting urban biodiversity, food security and local economies. While the impacts of profitability on municipal support remain unknown, Hidden Harvest hopes that their role in providing invaluable community services would be recognized, along with their view of profit as a social good.

As well, should Hidden Harvest begin to profit more than the average farmer (increasingly possible as more harvests take place) and continue to grow the number of



harvests each year, they would likely attract more attention and be held to the same standards in terms of food safety and regulation. If the social enterprise reaches a certain size in terms of harvesting capacity and participation, there is a fear that farmers, as well as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), might pay more attention to Hidden Harvest, particularly in demanding that they play by the same regulatory rules. For instance, commercial fruit farms require that hand washing stations are present near the fruit trees for employees. This, among many other food safety standards, would be difficult for Hidden Harvest to implement if their scale increases. Other food safety standards can be met through partnerships with organizations that already have such capacities and equipment, including refrigerated trucks that certain food agencies can provide to Hidden Harvest. While it is apparent that Hidden Harvest is an agricultural model that differs greatly from the traditional modes of production regulated by governmental organizations, they face similar challenges as other small-scale vendors and food producers in relation to food regulations<sup>5</sup>. Garlough notes that selling food through formalized market channels, including farmer's markets, restaurants and retailers, generates more attention from regulatory bodies than food distributed through informal markets practices, such as bartering or donations.

Hidden Harvest proponents also expressed concern over the ways in which profitability might impact the primarily volunteer labour force that is fundamental to Hidden Harvest operations. Garlough views the reliance of many community-supported agriculture businesses on unpaid labour through internships as problematic, and questions whether people will still want to volunteer with Hidden Harvest if they were to become profitable (in a more mainstream sense).

## Rescuing Fruit and Nuts in Other Cities

Many other efforts take place throughout Canada to save fruits and nuts in urban municipalities, from Victoria, British Columbia to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Although these urban fruit and nut rescue organizations have similar aims and structures, Hidden Harvest is nonetheless singular in the ways in which it operates as a social enterprise—attempting to cover costs and generate surplus—rather than relying solely on external funding. For instance, the organization keeps ¼ of the share of fruit to sell to processors to generate income to support harvest activities. Although, this income is not enough to cover basic operating costs, profitability is a goal for Hidden Harvest as they continue to grow the scale of the organization and seek to create additional income-generating opportunities. As noted, profitability for Hidden Harvest, as a social enterprise, is defined as a means to ensure sustainable operations, eliminate the need for external funding, and ensure that employees receive a living

<sup>5</sup>

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/food-regulations-put-small-vendors-in-a-pickle/article1378021/>



wage. Equally, being in Ottawa has proven to be advantageous for Hidden Harvest, as it promotes connectivity to federal governing bodies, as well as many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose head offices are located in the National Capital Region.

In seeking to support the cause of urban fruit and nut rescue, Hidden Harvest has made important connections with several similar groups, to share experiences and provide support<sup>6</sup>. Meaningful relationships are easier to form and maintain with larger groups, but are more difficult to form with some smaller, less organized, volunteer-directed projects, where the turnover rate makes it difficult to form sustainable partnerships. Hidden Harvest also benefitted from the knowledge and experiences shared by other, more established harvest organizations, such as Not Far From the Tree in Toronto (est. 2008), a non-profit organization that, like Hidden Harvest, shares fruits between homeowners, volunteers and food agencies (Not Far From the Tree, 2017). Equally, as one of the more well-established and larger organizations, Hidden Harvest shares their experiences with groups wanting to set up their own urban gleaning projects in other cities—including, most recently, a group from Halifax that established the urban gleaning organization *Found*. In forming these partnerships, Canadian urban tree harvest organizations work together to draw attention to and legitimize the practice of gleaning fruits and nuts in cities.

For instance, select organizations, along with Hidden Harvest, worked to produce a YouTube video and television commercial promoting their combined efforts and community impacts.<sup>7</sup> The TV spot was inspired by the *Hinterland Who's Who* public service announcements produced by Environment Canada beginning in the 1960s, that feature a short education segment on different Canadian wildlife species. Those produced by the fruit rescue organizations profile 'urban harvesters' across Canada using the same cinematic format and narration styling. Using the credibility gained from this promotion, Garlough hopes to build a national organization to support and fund fruit trees projects with the help of Tree Canada. Tree Canada is a non-profit organization that aims to increase awareness of the non-commercial values of trees—including their ecosystems services and their aesthetic value in urban areas—and to support and fund tree planting (Tree Canada, 2017). Partnership between Tree Canada and Canadian fruit rescue organizations would enhance the food security value of trees, and support the planting and harvesting of urban fruit trees.

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<sup>6</sup> A list of Canadian urban fruit harvest organizations is provided in the Online Resources section at the end of the document.

<sup>7</sup> *Hinterland Who's Who: Urban Harvesters*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmMy0Bzyio0>

## Looking to the Future

Both Garlough and Siks stressed the unrealized potential of Hidden Harvest, particularly as their own personal and professional commitments have drawn them away from the social enterprise. The addition of a part-time employee this year, thanks in part to an AAFC grant and funding acquired through Beau's Oktoberfest, lessened some pressure for the co-founders. The implementation of the volunteer-run advisory committee also offsets some of their workload. Siks hopes Hidden Harvest will be taken over by the community entirely, possibly leading to neighborhood-led branches connected to an overarching and supporting organization. She ties this type of model to that of Ottawa's Community Gardening Network (run by Just Food), which oversees and supports garden projects throughout the city that function relatively independently of one another.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 9: A young harvest volunteer shows off her bounty

One of the prospective plans to increase profitability would emulate a community-supported agriculture (CSA) model by selling foods while sharing risks with buyers and consumers. Though selling fruits is complex and time-consuming, the potential plan aims to also mirror a supply management model, like the dairy industry (recall Garlough's parents are dairy farmers). This model is based on the notion that processors buy a quota for the opportunity to buy milk to then make cheese or other products. In the case of Hidden Harvest, 'quota' would take the form of a 'sponsorship' through which a restaurant (or other food business) would buy a license for a share of the harvest of a particular species in a geographic area. For instance, a brewery would be able to buy the first right of refusal to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the sour cherries in a particular neighborhood. In purchasing this license, the business would have access to not only the produce but also its accompanying story, which would include a social media 'story' and pictures to share with their consumers for marketing purposes.

<sup>8</sup> Ottawa Community Garden Network: <http://justfood.ca/community-gardening-network/>





## Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Hidden Harvest embraces innovation as it continually evolves to not only better meet community needs, but also become a self-sustaining social enterprise. Co-founder Garlough sees each new harvest season as a means through which to rebuild the organization based on lessons learned over the previous year. This openness to change and willingness to adapt has allowed the enterprise to grow the number of events and increase the amount of fruit and nuts rescued each year. In part, the reliance on technology to coordinate harvest events has provided a means to reduce overhead costs and staffing needs, while enabling growth and flexibility. Equally, social media has provided a key method for the organization to promote itself and its cause by sharing stories and pictures of harvest events and workshops. Traditional media outlets have also served as an important means to spread their message, and Hidden Harvest has been featured on local television and radio programs, in local newspapers and magazines, and in a national Canadian journal. The ability to share their story brings legitimacy to the practice of harvesting urban fruits and nuts, and can help to inspire similar actions in other municipalities.

In continuing to develop and change the ways in which Hidden Harvest operates, partnerships with local organizations and actors play a key role in the re-evaluation and progression of business practices and organizational model. Garlough notes that with experience, they have learned how best to work with local, small-scale food processors, the municipal government, and food agencies.

With the small-scale food processors, this means delivering fruits and nuts to their doorstep, and embracing alternate modes of exchange for fruits, allowing processors to barter or offer whatever share of the profits they can. Hidden Harvest has learnt to communicate their role and benefits in ways that the municipal government understands, particularly in emphasizing the ways in which they contribute to food security, and offer an effective means to divert waste and increase sustainability in Ottawa. For instance, the services Hidden Harvest offers to the community and the city by creating alternate means to feed people, manage renewable resources, developing green infrastructure and diverting waste from landfills, speak to the aims of different city offices, including community and social services, energy planning, and forestry services.

In partnering with food agencies, Hidden Harvest has learnt to meet their needs through providing training opportunities and harvest equipment as well as helping to organize harvest events for clients. Garlough states that food agencies continually need to apply for funding, and that projects with Hidden Harvest allow them to access additional funds while expanding their program offerings. He notes that it is not much different than if the food agency were to apply for a grant to hire a professional chef to

run food preparation workshops for their clients, particularly as Hidden Harvest events also provide opportunities to improve food knowledge and skills.

Through these efforts, Hidden Harvest is better equipped to deal with complex questions, such as those around liability. While the social enterprise hopes to engage more formally in the local economy to become profitable, many of their activities take place outside of conventional economic practices. The sharing, donating and bartering of foods with a diversity of local actors strengthens both food security and the economy. All told, Hidden Harvest aspires to demonstrate that profitability can go hand in hand with social good by meeting local community needs.

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### Online Resources

Hidden Harvest

<http://ottawa.hiddenharvest.ca/>

Parkdale Food Center

<http://parkdalefoodcentre.ca/>

Tree Canada

<https://treecanada.ca/en/>





## A sample of Hidden Harvest's media coverage:

Kitchissippi Times (December, 2016)

<https://kitchissippi.com/2016/12/16/hidden-harvest-ottawa/>

CBC radio – Ottawa Morning (October, 2016)

<http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2696062690>

Ottawa Citizen (July, 2016)

<http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/the-upbeat-hidden-harvest-looking-for-neighbourhood-leaders-as-fruit-season-begins>

Edible Ottawa Magazine (May, 2015)

<http://edibleottawa.ediblecommunities.com/food-thought/hidden-harvest>

CBC – Our Ottawa (September, 2014)

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/hidden-harvest-volunteers-roam-the-city-picking-wild-fruit-and-nuts-1.2757223>

'Concrete Orchard: Ottawa's new urban forage business feeds the needy', Denise Derby, Alternatives Journal, 39:3 (2013).



## Canadian urban fruit rescue and/or gleaning organizations:

### Alberta

Operation Fruit Tree Rescue Edmonton – OFRE (Edmonton)

<http://operationfruitrescue.org/>

Fruits of Sherbrook (Edmonton)

<http://www.fruitsofsherbrooke.ca/>

Calgary Harvest (Calgary)

<https://calgaryharvest.wordpress.com/>

### British Columbia

Harvest Rescue (Nelson)

<http://foodcupboard.org/harvest-rescue/>

Lifecycles Fruit Trees Project (Victoria)

<http://lifecyclesproject.ca/our-projects/fruit-tree-project/>

Richmond Fruit Tree Program (Richmond)

<http://www.richmondfoodsecurity.org/programs/richmond-fruit-recovery-program/>

One Straw Society Fruit Tree Project (Sunshine Coast)

<http://www.onestraw.ca/share/fruit-tree-project/>

Vancouver Fruit Tree Project (Vancouver)

<https://vancouverfruittree.com/>

OK Fruit Tree Project (Okanagan)

<https://www.facebook.com/OkanaganFruitTreeProject/>

### Manitoba

Fruit Share Manitoba (Winnipeg)

<http://www.fruitshare.ca/>

Fruit Share Steinbach (Steinbach)

<http://fruitsharesteinbach.ca/>



## **Newfoundland and Labrador**

St. John's Fruit Tree Project (St. John's)

<http://www.foodfirstnl.ca/rcr-archive/2011/08/st-johns-fruit-tree-project>

## **Nova Scotia**

Found (Halifax)

<http://www.foundns.com/>

## **Ontario**

Not Far from the Tree (Toronto)

<http://notfarfromthetree.org/>

Halton Fruit Tree Project (Halton)

<http://www.haltonfruittreeproject.org/>

The Garden of Eating (Niagara)

<http://www.thegardenofeating-niagara.com/>

Fruit for All (Sudbury)

<https://www.facebook.com/fruitforallsudbury/>

Gleaners Guild (Waterloo Region)

<http://gleanersguild.ca/about/>

<https://twitter.com/gleanersguild>

Appleseed Collective (Guelph)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/576194365814006/>

## **Québec**

Les Fruits Défendus (Montréal)

<http://santropolroulant.org/en/what-is-the-roulant/collectives/fruits-defendus/>

## **Saskatchewan**

Fruit for Thought (Regina)

<http://fruit-for-thought-regina.blogspot.ca/>

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## Appendix I

This spread sheet calculates that value of fruit collected and distributed by Hidden Harvest, and is used to help determine the social return on investment (SROI) of harvests. The costs of fruit are based on proxies gleaned from wholesale food prices, for the fruits and nuts that are donated and processed, and from retail food prices, for food going to the homeowners and volunteers.

Retail Value of Fruit Harvested and Donated (\$)									
	Year	2012				2013			
Species	Total	Total	Processed	Donated	Volunteers/ Homeowners	Total	Processed	Donated	Volunteers/ Homeowners
Apples	8855.31	273.44	31.25	125.00	117.19	8581.88	1178.50	2984.00	4419.38
Black walnuts (husked)	2677.50	1050.00	131.25	525.00	393.75	1627.50	223.13	735.00	669.38
Butternut	56.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	56.00	0.00	17.50	38.50
Cherries	74.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	74.04	0.00	28.58	45.47
Crab-apples	434.20	87.50	10.00	40.00	37.50	346.70	35.60	177.60	133.50
Elderberries	356.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	356.91	21.66	75.38	259.88
Ginkgo	113.85	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	113.85	0.00	4.60	109.25
Grapes	1009.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1009.10	132.23	361.20	515.68
Plums	157.08	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	157.08	20.00	70.00	67.08
Serviceberries	135.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	135.00	0.00	27.00	108.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13868.99</b>								