

# Scarborough Neighbourhood Fresh Food 2022 Pilot Learning Report

## LEAD PARTNERS

**marketcity**<sup>TO</sup>  
public markets network



## FUNDERS





# Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that the work stewarded by marketcity TO takes place on many Indigenous nations' traditional territories.

Tkarón:to has been cared for by the Anishinabeg Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, and its current treaty holders, the Mississau-gas of the Credit First Nation.

Now home to many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities, this territory is subject to the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to share and care for the land and resources in the Great Lakes region peacefully. The dish with one spoon reminds people we only have one dish, one mother earth we can take from. Therefore, we should take only what we need, leave something for others, and keep the dish clean. It also demonstrates our collective responsibility to share equally.

This area had been a gathering place for Indigenous peoples for centuries before colonization; they hosted the original markets. The relationship between food, culture, land, and communities informs our work on Public Markets. As we work towards collectively reimagining Toronto as a Market City, a place with many and diverse networks of commerce and trade, and mobilize the partnerships to make it happen, we prioritize finding ways to support Indigenous Food Sovereignty in their territory.

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This Learning Report was prepared by Marina Queirolo, founder and steward of marketcityTO. This report aims to share with partners and the broader public market, food and farming sector the learnings from implementing the Scarborough Fresh Food Pilot in 2022 so that together, we continue to advance a fairer and more sustainable regional food economy for everyone.

This pilot was funded by the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance and the City of Toronto Economic Development, Food Cluster Division and was delivered in partnership with Jennifer Forde, founder of Vision Quest Management and Red Onion Events.

We are grateful for the partners and funders involved. This pilot would not have been possible without their contributions and participation.

This includes Jennifer Forde, Paul Sawtell, Dave Kranenburg, Mohamed A Mohamed, Clair Pertulla, Alfred Lam, Perris Kajirwa, Chelsea Wu, Canon Dondal Butler, Brian Richards, Robin, Peter LeBlanc, Gerald Wheatley, staff from 100km Foods and Graze & Gather, the more than 15 vendors and small businesses participating at the market and Helen Mana, Olivia Rodriguez, Astan Simpara, Jaime Rosenbield, Tremar Arikic, Aleeza Faward, Saiyeeda Farhin and Daphmalli Edovard that worked at the Ontario Fresh Food Table. Lastly, Janet Horner and Michael Wolfson helped us secure the project's funding and became allies for the work.

## ⇒ Acknowledgements

September 2023

*This report is designed to be viewed using the two-page panel.*

*Graphic Design: Marina Queirolo, marketcity TO*

*All photos in this report are credited to Marina Queirolo.*

*This report uses San Serif font size 11 for most of its text in compliance with AODA recommendations for access and ease of reading.*



Barry's Garden booth at  
Rosebank Farmers' Market



Helen at the Ontario Food Table at  
St. Andrews' Church Harvest Market



Exchanging Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks  
at Oakridge Farmers' Market

## → Introduction

In early 2021, Toronto's east-end individuals and organizations collaborated to co-create and prototype a new market model better suited to the urban context.

The Scarborough Fresh Food Pilot, led by Scarborough community champions and residents, drew from market managers' experience and expertise and those in food insecurity, community development, and the private sector.

Facilitated by marketcity TO, the program supports Scarborough residents and entrepreneurs while fostering community pride. It's designed for scalability, bringing together three interconnected programs neighborhood markets, an aggregate table of local produce, and a complementary currency program or Mrkt Bucks providing \$20/week per household to purchase Ontario farm fresh products at markets.

The Learning Report details the pilot's experiences, lessons, and future recommendations, showcasing Scarborough's innovative resilience.

In summary, this initiative demonstrates the power of collaboration that extends beyond addressing food insecurity and equity. It demonstrates the potential for collective action to bring about positive change in communities, fostering inclusivity and creating spaces where everyone participating feels valued and included.

By working together and building on each other's strengths, diverse stakeholders can catalyze much-needed action to address complex food access, equity and inclusion challenges in Toronto's east end, the City, and region.

## PROGRAM GOALS

- Build local capacity by working with and supporting market managers in making their markets more resilient and successful for them and their vendors.
- Increase equitable access to locally-produced food for all residents, especially those most impacted by food insecurity.
- Support small and medium enterprises and enable economic activities at a neighbourhood level, especially those most marginalized by systemic racism.
- Create a safe and vibrant public space where all Torontonians feel welcome and included.

## 2022 PILOT OBJECTIVES

- Support and work with **20 small and medium urban entrepreneurs, especially BIPOC entrepreneurs**, by providing access vending opportunities where they can test and sell their products
- **Support Jennifer Forde, market manager**, in delivering four existing farmers' markets and establishing one new Scarborough market in the area.
- **Provide access to customers to 30 small and medium producers.**
- Prototype **new aggregating and re-selling model** to increase access to good quality, fresh Ontario produce, eggs, honey and maple syrup through the season and **provide 5 to 10 youth employment opportunities.**
- **Prototype Scarb TO Mrkt bucks' coupon program**, enrolling 100 food-insecure households to receive \$20 market bucks per week for nine weeks.
- **Develop an evaluation & learning framework** allowing us to learn and scale the program across Scarborough neighbourhoods.

**QUICK FACTS**

- Our initiative serves residents, small and medium entrepreneurs, and BIPOC market managers, all disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pilot’s duration was from June to October and involved developing tools and formalizing partnerships in June and July, followed by twelve weeks of implementation from August to October 2022
- Implement 5 markets across Toronto’s end neighbourhoods: Maryvale, Oakridge, Malvern, Beach Hill and Agincourt North.
- Our model uses a 15-minute travel framework as a neighbourhood-based approach, ensuring the public market, community agencies, and residents are within a short distance.

**SNAPSHOT OF THE MODEL**

The initiative brings together three interconnected programs to deliver a new market model:

- A new or existing neighbourhood market with 10 to 15 businesses, usually urban entrepreneurs & start-ups.
- Ontario Fresh Food Table: a booth that aggregates and sells 100% locally produced fresh fruits, vegetables and other Ontario agricultural products.
- Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks: a complementary currency program that supplements residents’ income by providing \$20/week per household to spend at their local neighbourhood market.

Together, these programs increase access to locally produced culturally diverse fresh food in underserved neighbourhoods, support urban and rural farmers, advance more inclusive public spaces and “nano economies.”

At the same time, these programs impact the long-term sustainability of the markets and vendors by ensuring enough economic activity and product offerings to attract and serve residents of various income levels.





# Snapshot of 2022 Scarborough Fresh Food Pilot → 1 Model 3 Interconnected Programs

Program 1

## Public Markets

# 5 Neighbourhood Markets

3 New Markets

# 19

participating business at Scarborough Farmers' Market

# 27%

Increased Customers Scarborough Farmers' Market at Rosebank Park

7 Black owned businesses



Entrepreneurs selling at markets by race

- BIPOC owned businesses
- Other owned businesses

# 20%

Increased vendor sales Seasonal Average

Program 2

## Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks

# 6 Community Partners

# 100

Households Recruited

# 94

Households used Mrkt Bucks

# \$11,920

Mrkt Bucks disseminated

# \$8,672

Mrkt Bucks reimbursed

# 73%

Redemption Rate



Participating Households by race

- Black
- Indigenous
- People of Color

Program 3

## Ontario Fresh Food Table

# 2 Distribution Partners + 33 Urban & Rural Producers

# \$14,570

Sales at the OFFT

# \$3,615

ScarbTO Mrkt Bucks used at the OFFT

8 Youth + 1 Urban Grower Employed at OFFT



Staff Employed at the OFFT by race

- BIPOC staff
- Other Staff



## ⇒ Recommendations

Four recommendations and areas to work on:

### 1) **Phase 2 Pilot: Scale Program delivery by:**

- Supporting three Neighbourhood Markets for an entire season (21 weeks implementation).
- Refining and improving approaches to address logistics issues learnt during phase 1 implementation (storage, produce pick up & aggregator hub).
- Supporting the establishment of a Year-round market in Scarborough

### 2) **Advocate and collaborate with the City of Toronto to improve policies**

- Revisit the Special event Permit to include a new Market Category that better represents what is happening in the community and promotes transparency.  
Or create a new permit for Public Markets Permits that includes various market models (e.g., Farmers' Markets, Neighbourhood Markets, Good Food Markets, Fresh Food Markets, Bazaars, etc.)

### 3) **Establish or enhance access to infrastructure that can effectively support the delivery of neighborhood markets and amplify their impact in the community.**

- Collaborate with public institutions like Toronto Public Libraries, Community Centers, and the Parks and Forestry & Recreation division to devise solutions that provide access to storage, power, water, and permanent signage for all markets held in public parks. This effort aims to create a more conducive environment for successful market operations and community engagement.

### 4) **Build a case for a Regional Nutritional Coupon Program**

- Map existing Mrkt Bucks or complementary currency programs delivered within the Golden Horseshoe Region.
- Develop a National Mrkt Bucks Task Force that brings together organizations implementing Mrkt Bucks programs in the Golden Horseshoe region and other provincial or national with programs and experience in the area to enable collaboration and advance collective actions that can lead to Provincial and Federal support.



## → Approach

What makes this initiative unique is its collaborative, participatory approach that began before securing funding. Led by Jen Forde and facilitated by Marina Queirolo, partners joined forces, leveraging their expertise and experiences to address shared challenges. Monthly meetings were held to refine the model, identify gaps, form new partnerships, and explore funding opportunities for prototyping.

A network approach, developed by marketcity TO, fostered collaboration among current and future partners, enabling them to create, prototype solutions, and learn from implementation. This process yielded three outcomes: a trusted network of community experts, a strategic plan for fundraising, and a valuable learning report.

Completing one learning cycle, this report not only serves as a tool for funders but also aids ongoing fundraising efforts to scale the program and amplify its impact. It demonstrates the power of community collaboration and shared expertise in addressing complex challenges.

### PARTNERS LIST

**Public Markets:** Red Onions Events

**Community:** Malvern Family Resource Centre; Centre for Immigrant & Communities Services; TAIBU Community Health Centre; Grant African Methodist Church and The Church of St. Andrews's Scarborough

**Academic:** University of T Scarborough Feeding City Lab

**Private Sector:** 100km Foods and Grace & Gather Foods

**Funders:** Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance, City of Toronto Ec. Dev. Division Food Cluster



Jennifer Forde and Marina Queirolo at St. Andrews Church Harvest Market

[Link to video](#)

## WHAT WE DID

- Held monthly meetings from March 2021 to June 2022 to co-create and refine model.
- Fundraised: identified funders & developed proposal.
- Researched existing national and international models, coupon programs and aggregating models.
- Developed a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners.

*“This pilot proves that we can build successful markets in this community and confirms that fresh produce drives the market,” Jennifer shared at our end-of-year reflection. “I was also surprised how diverse communities, especially new immigrants, look for good quality farm staples like eggs, honey and maple syrup, and artisanal goods like homemade salsa.” Lastly, we knew this before we started, but it was good to confirm that “consistency is key” — we can do this with resources and proper support from the city.*

*Jennifer Forde, Market Manager*

## WHAT WE LEARNED

- Regular meetings and opportunities to work together help build trust and increase project ownership.
- Key to place partners and people with lived experiences and knowledge of their community at the center of the design process.
- The need to inform the model and help develop solutions to existing challenges.
- Regular engagement and commitments to tasks helped us identify the right partners for every neighbourhood and confirm who is genuinely committed and willing to invest time and resources to build an initiative together.
- Outreach and building relationships with other Canadian organizations that had done this work before (e.g., BC Nutritional Coupon Program or Calgary Dollars) helped us move quickly and save resources.
- Backbone support and coordination are critical to enabling organizations from various sectors (market managers, food banks, religious institutions, city staff, funders) to collaborate, co-create, fundraise, and implement the pilot. Community agencies and market managers do not have the capacity or priority to dedicate time to create agendas, do research, set up follow-up meetings and keep the group accountable.
- Managing so many partners, priorities, and personalities is both incredibly rewarding and, at the same time, challenging. Having good communication and “soft” skills is incredibly important.



Customers at the Ontario Fresh Food Table at St. Andrew's Anglican Church Harvest Market



Prevailing Organic Essential vending at Oakridge Farmers' Market



Children creating a food pathway at Courtyard Farmers' Market

## → Context

The pandemic exposed flaws in Toronto's food distribution system, revealing inequities and racism that hindered fresh food access and economic opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Jennifer Forde, frustrated with disinvestment in Toronto's east end, initiated the Malvern Farmers' Market in 2018, Courtyard Farmers' Market in 2019 and later the Scarborough Farmers' Market in 2020. These markets celebrate food, diversity, culture, and community during the outdoor season, connecting patrons with local farmers and artisans.

In 2021, Jennifer and Marina Queirola began crafting a new neighborhood food market model as a response to Scarborough's challenges. Diverse partners were invited to join this collaborative effort, contributing ideas and support to the design process. This initiative aims to address issues like fresh food access and economic opportunities for market managers, residents, and entrepreneurs in Scarborough.

We have identified four main issues

### **URBAN ENTREPRENEURS' ACCESS TO CUSTOMERS:**

Toronto's independent retail and consumer services sector is a major employment source, comprising 42% of the city's total employment with 647,843 jobs (5). However, challenges in the past seven years, such as reduced access to affordable locations and a shift to institutional ownership, have negatively impacted small and medium businesses, especially on main streets (6). These businesses are forced to relocate or close due to high rental prices. Public markets offer a solution by diversifying retail options and providing a low-risk platform for product

testing, supporting local economies in every neighborhood. They also create part-time employment opportunities, particularly benefiting new immigrants, including women, and fostering community-level innovation.'

### **FARMERS PARTICIPATION & INCOME**

Traditionally, Toronto's farmers' markets require a minimum of 51% farmers (urban or rural) to comply with the farmer' market designation (Ontario Regulation 562 on food premises). This rule, while important, poses challenges in both new markets or in low-income areas, as it is hard for farmers to secure enough sales to offset the cost involved in getting to markets. Market managers like Jennifer Ford of Scarborough Farmers' Markets struggle to secure farmers for her markets, resulting in one or two vendors offering fresh food and inconsistent presence throughout the season and across markets.

### **RESIDENT'S ACCESS TO LOCALLY PRODUCED FRESH PRODUCE, FRUITS AND OTHER AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.**

Scarborough residents must travel significant distances to access grocery stores compared to residents of Toronto's inner-urban areas. Thus, they regularly face challenges accessing high-quality, affordable, locally produced, and culturally diverse food (6). Furthermore, while farmers' markets can provide access to fresh produce, prices pose a financial barrier for many residents, leading to fewer farmers' markets in these neighbourhoods and challenging the viability of farmers' markets over time.

### **NEW POLICIES FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD MARKETS**

Toronto's current Special Event Permits, caters only to farmers' markets, requiring 51% farmer participation, which serves well neighbourhoods that can support that number of producers. However, in other cases this exception leaves many urban entrepreneurs without a platform. We need a new market category that's community-centric, flexible, and inclusive. This model should accommodate Ontario produce re-sellers, support small-scale producers, and embrace diverse urban entrepreneurs while fostering transparency for customers.

## PROGRAM DETAILS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The next few pages speak in more detail about the various programs and provide insights gained from implementation.

### PROGRAM 1

## → Neighbourhood Markets

Neighborhood Markets are the heart of this community initiative, serving as powerful hubs for social, economic, and environmental action. Neighborhood Markets embody a community-driven agile market model that can respond to residents' and entrepreneurs' needs.

Led by Jennifer Forde, a Scarborough resident, she knows the complexities of building thriving markets and based on her experience "It starts with the right vendor mix tailored to each community".

As an experienced market manager, Jennifer fosters a welcoming atmosphere for local residents looking to showcase their start-up businesses by simplifying the application process, offering affordable booth options, and providing coaching on booth displays. Her markets are often referred to as "incubator markets," where vendors can test their products, gain confidence and serve as a stepping stone for vendors looking to apply to larger, more established markets, including those managed by Jennifer in downtown Toronto.

During the pilot program in Scarborough, Jennifer delivered five markets, three of them being new. Each engaging 10-15 vendors, with over 50% being BIPOC, particularly women, people venturing into new careers, and Scarborough residents.

The markets attracted residents for fresh goods and a sense of community. For instance, Rosebank Park Farmers' Market, in operation since 2019, regularly drew around 300 residents and featured diverse entrepreneurs offering products like Tamales, artisanal bread, Jamaican honey, and wellness items. Layered with light touch programming like live music, yoga or art, residents quickly became regular visitors.

Markets launched in June and saw increased customer diversity and numbers by August when we introduced the Ontario Fresh Food Table with additional produce options and the Market Bucks program that helped residents with limited income shop and participate.

As the pilot season ended, customers asked, "Where will we find fresh food now?" and inquired about winter options. Unfortunately, Scarborough lacks winter or year-round farmers' markets.

*"I come to this market every Tuesday to shop; I'm very happy that this market is that it is not too far from my house. Every Tuesday, I bring my kids here, and we get to enjoy and try different things. The quality of the fruits and vegetables is very good, and they last for a week. People are nice and welcoming. I'm sad that during the winter, it is not here, and I cannot wait until next summer so I can come again."*

*Nahima, Rose Bank Farmers' Market*



Customers at Rosebank Farmers' Market

# Farmers' markets add to health and wellness of community

By Qing Wang

JENNIFER FORDE, the founder of the Courtyard and Scarborough Farmers' Markets, is leading the charge to provide nutritious food to east-end communities.

Forde wants to not only help farmers and vendors develop their brand but aims "to work with diverse communities that reflect the communities and neighbourhoods we serve in the spirit of community health and wellness."

The Scarborough Farmers' Market started in 2017 with the launch of the Malvern Farmers' Market in northeast Scarborough.

The goal was to bring nutritious, dense, fairly priced, culturally appropriate fresh fruits and vegetables as well as lifestyle products to the area.

The vendors were family-owned farms, women-led enterprises and ethnic-cultural businesses that represent the diversity and richness of Toronto. Items for sale included fresh vegetables, fruits and meats, prepared foods like homemade sausages and baked goods, and organic handmade products such as soy candles.

Since 2018, Forde has been collaborating with Marina Quinlan, founder and steward of Market City TO. Quinlan has 20 years' experience in public markets, first as a vendor then a market manager of Progress Fresh Markets, and now a researcher and advocate for public-

private economic development and great at supporting local food, as such we need to not only protect markets, but also increase residents' understanding about the importance supporting neighbourhood markets," said Quinlan.

Due to the way large grocery stores rely on global supply chains Toronto has only three days' worth of food, she said.

Toronto has more than 200 diverse public markets, and Quinlan collaborates with market managers, like Forde, policy makers and researchers to rebuild the mid-size food distribution infrastructure anchored in local farmers and food entrepreneurs.

This season, they are launching two programs that support a market model that is better suited to the Scarborough context.

An aggregate table called the Ontario Fresh Food Table, aggregates 20 producers in one booth, bringing affordable Ontario produce, including organic offerings.

With proper signage, the stand recognizes the provenance of the ingredients and the farmers involved, including ways what growers that cannot produce enough to supply a single table for an entire season.

"We have many farmers of all different sizes and scales, but many urban growers don't have the ability to be at a booth for the whole season because they don't have enough production," Quinlan said. "This table can make them worth it."



Photo above, Jennifer Forde (second from right) is the founder of the Courtyard and Scarborough Farmers' Markets. She is seen with vendors at the Scarborough Farmers' Market at Oakridge Park recently. Photos below, show some of the vendors at the market.



ment to local residents, especially youth, interested in food production, marketing, and distribution. In addition, any unused ingredients will be picked up by the partnered

ers and farmers who can focus increasing their growing capacity.

The markets will also partner with local food banks and community agencies to launch a "meal banks" coupon program for items selected by the food banks are currently experiencing scarcity.

Selected families will receive for a period of six weeks to choose any kind of vegetables, eggs, herbs or honey at the market fresh food table.

While commerce is the motivation of markets, they are great community spaces, and let managers like Forde create meaningful public spaces where vendors can enjoy themselves.

Forde has partners with the Metro Public Library and the department of Imaginary Affairs offer bi-weekly market workshops a curated reading series to grass space at the markets 4:30 to 5 p.m., and more activities are planned.

Forde encourages everyone come and enjoy the market when they meet new residents, Aes, and help build local networks and community relations.

The Courtyard Farmers' Market at Fairmount Park (1177 Gerrard E.) is open on Wednesdays 1:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Scarborough Farmers' Market at Oakridge Park (3430 Birch Ave.) is open on Thursdays 1:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Both markets are open on



Honey Guru vending at Oakridge Farmers' Market



## WHAT WE DID

- Access: Delivered five public markets across Toronto's East End.
- Economic Opportunities: 10 to 15 participating vendors per market.
- Diversity: 53% BIPOC urban & rural entrepreneurs, strongly connected to Scarborough residents.
- Promotion: Developed promotional tools to increase awareness of the markets.
- Evaluation: Developed a tool to record data and insights from observations from daily market operations.

DAY & TIME	MARKET	LOCATION
Tuesday From 3:30 to 7:30pm	Scarborough Farmers' Market	Rosebank Public Park
Wednesday From 3:30 to 7:30pm	Courtyard Farmers' Market	Fairmont Public Park
Thursday From 3:30 to 7:30pm	Scarborough Farmers' Market	Oakridge Public Park
Friday From 2 to 6pm	Scarborough Harvester Farmers' Market	St. Andrew's Anglican Church
Sunday From 10am to 2pm	Scarborough Farmers' Market	Woodside Square Mall - Private property

## WHAT WE LEARNED

- More vendors, quality fresh produce and farm products (eggs, honey & maple) attract more customers.
- Visibility, welcoming space and location of the market have a significant impact on its success.
- Markets located at the Mall's parking lots face significant hurdles to their success, including limitations on what vendors can offer, the market location and promotion due to agreements with operators and indoor tenants.
- Support and regular attendance of residents lead to sales, helps retain market vendors. However, vendors should also be responsive to residents' needs and preferences for a successful partnership.
- It is vital to access permanent signage to promote the market when it is not in operation.
- Access to storage for tents and tables will enable more vendor participation, especially for those who don't have a vehicle to come to market, and support the market manager in operations and logistics.
- In piloting five markets, three were near public institutions, like community centers, libraries, or schools. Collaborating with these institutions is crucial, as they can offer valuable support, including storage, communication, and cross-promotion.
- Integrating visits to Farmers' Markets into the School Curriculum benefits teachers, children and caretakers! For example, 3rd grade French teachers from Bowmore Road School near the Courtyard Farmers Market inspired her students by visiting the market with her students every Wednesday. This sparked the students' knowledge of seasonal foods and broadened their culinary horizons. Kids became market advocates and encouraged their parents to visit and shop.



PROGRAM 2

# ➔ ScarbTO Mrkt Bucks

Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks is a complementary currency or “market bucks” program that supplements residents’ income by providing \$20/week per household to spend at their neighbourhood market. From August to October, each family could spend their Mrkt Bucks at the five participating neighbourhood market to purchase Ontario vegetables, fruits, eggs and honey.

This program aims to enable low-income residents to access fresh food in a non-stigmatizing environment while supporting the livelihood of Ontario fruits and vegetables producers and re-sellers at the markets.

Various successful models currently in implementation across North America inspired our model and, more specifically, the BC Nutritional Coupon Program. Peter Lebanc, managing the BC program, met with us a few times to share insights and tools that helped us speed up the process and save resources.

From June to October, we worked closely with six community partners in each neighbourhood to identify 100 food-insecure households, more than our original target, willing to participate in the program. In total, they disseminated \$11,920 Mrkt Bucks, and by the end of the pilot, we tracked a 73% redemption rate. Our pilot focused on BIPOC populations, and of the households that benefited from the program, more than 50% were Black, followed by People of Color and a smaller number of Indigenous People.

Every week, we saw individuals and families return to the market, and we had great conversations about the new ingredients available and why it is important to eat locally and seasonally. The families’ diversity

challenged us to learn how to communicate through food, as in many cases, English was not their first language. We laughed together and built relationships that helped many marginalized residents feel included and welcomed at the market.

Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks Partners Outreach	# of Household
Malvern Family Resource Centre	20
Centre for Immigrant & Communities Services	40
TAIBU Community Health Centre	20
Grant African Methodist Church	10
The Church of St. Andrews’s Scarborough	10
	100

*“Thank You So Much! I’m on ODSP, and I pay market rent, and there is no money left for food come 4 pm on the 1st of the month after the bills are paid. I’m left with \$17 for the next 31 Days to live on. And this is the greatest gift. Thank you so much. I am so grateful.”*

*ScarbTO Mrkt Bucks Program participant*



# Snapshot Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks Impact → Program 2

## PARTNERS

6 Community Partners



## PARTICIPANTS

100 Households Recruited

94 Households used Mrkt Bucks at 1 or 5 neighbourhood Markets

\$11,920 Mrkt Bucks disseminated

73% Redemption Rate



Participating Households by race

- Black
- Indigenous
- People of Color

## VENDORS

4 Produce Vendors Participating at markets

33 urban & rural producers impacted

\$8,672 sales using Mrkt Bucks

58% Mrkt Bucks redeemed at vendors increasing sales and exposure to new customers

\$1400

\$1200

\$1000

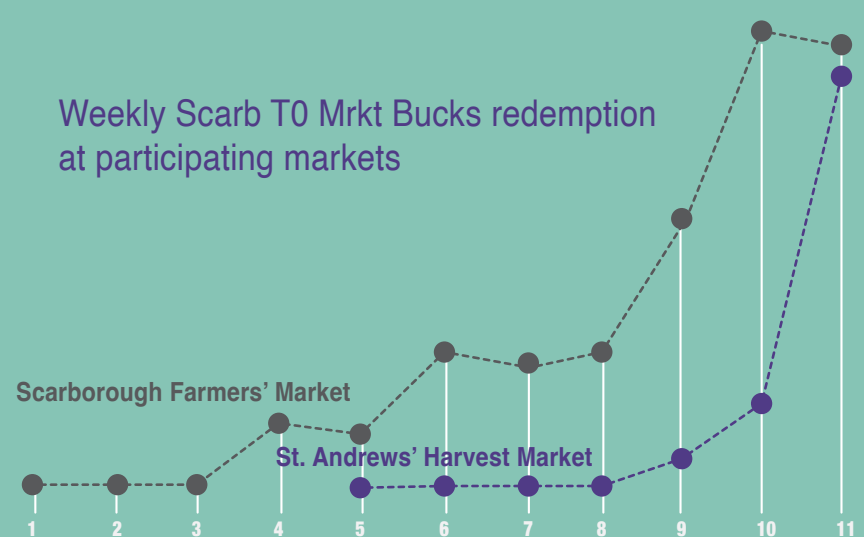
\$800

\$600

\$400

\$200

WEEKS



## WHAT WE DID

### → **Selecting Community Partners**

To ensure convenience for residents receiving market bucks, we sought out food banks, community agencies, and religious institutions located in close proximity to Jennifer Ford's 2022 planned market for season. This approach minimized travel distances and enhanced accessibility for participants. Once confirmed, partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining roles and responsibilities.

→ **Participants Recruitment:** Partners took the lead in recruitment efforts. Some had pre-existing food access programs and integrated this opportunity seamlessly. Others, recognizing the community's food insecurity, reallocated staff resources to back this initiative, even if they lacked existing programs.

→ **Outreach & Implementation Tools:** We developed the tools to promote the program (posters & flyers), an enrollment form and an online tracking sheet to monitor participation with partners.

We designed & printed the Scarborough Market bucks in two denominations (\$2 and \$5) so it was easy for participants to split their market bucks and benefit various vendors.

In addition, tabletop signs and banners helped residents identify which booths accepted market bucks.

→ **Training vendors and staff support:** This was done at each market by marketcityTO, with the support of the market manager. At the market, we had a program host who welcomed and tracked residents' participation and at the end of each market, redeemed the Mrkt Bucks from each participating vendor.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

*Our diverse partners enabled us to adapt to varying priorities and learn different approaches for serving a wide range of residents. During this pilot, partners didn't receive funds to cover the time dedicated to the project, including staff time. In the future, we aim to collaborate earlier to integrate this program into their work plans and explore potential fundraising support. A signed partnership agreement ensured roles and responsibilities were clear and kept us accountable for our role throughout implementation.*

*Community partners with trust and relationships with food-insecure residents are critical to the program's success. Identifying eligible individuals and families and guiding them through the program is time-consuming. Agencies with dedicated staff for this task achieved more success in enrolling households.*

*During the pilot, having readily available tracking and promotional tools were crucial for seamless implementation. We had planned for a single poster and flyer but quickly realized we needed the outreach tools developed in various languages to cater to the immigrant populations (English, Spanish & Mandarin) predominant at each of the markets. Replenishing Mrkt Bucks to partners throughout the program was challenging. Ideally, for the next pilot we develop a digital tool or print larger quantities of Mrkt Bucks that are distributed only once or twice a season.*

*Clear guidance ensured that everyone involved could effectively use the various implementation, marketing and tracking tools developed to deliver the program, enhancing participants' overall experience. Regular monitoring of booth activities was essential, and additional training sessions were necessary as the season advanced, accounting for potential staff turnover.*

## WHAT WE DID

- **Dissemination of the Mrkt Bucks:** Throughout the pilot, we experimented with two methods for distributing Mrkt Bucks:

At the Agency: Organizations meeting with clients weekly directly handed out the market bucks at their locations.

At the Market: Organizations without regular programs at their sites gave us a participant lists. Residents visited our table at the market to obtain Mrkt Bucks.

- **Redeeming Mrkt Bucks at the markets:** A crucial part of the program is to ensure all participants feel welcome, comfortable and not judged. We hosted a welcome circle at Rose Bank Park on the first day with the local partner for that purpose. It was an opportunity to meet the participants, introduce ourselves and for the market manager to lead a market tour. A Program Host was assigned to address queries and extend a warm welcome. This personalized approach helped Mrkt Buck participants grasp how the program both provides them fresh food access and supports fair pricing for growers, fostering a sense of belonging to a larger community effort.

- **Reimbursement of the Mrkt Bucks to Vendors:**

At the end of each market program, staff visited the participating vendors and reimbursed in cash or e-transfer the Mrkt Bucks. One market buck equals one Canadian dollar.

For youth employed at the Ontario Fresh Food Table, we used a tracking sheet to record sales, and it included a section to track Mrkt Bucks's redemption.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

*Both distribution approaches have their merits.*

*Providing Mrkt Bucks in advance, streamlined participant vendor interactions. In-person pickups at the Ontario Food Table built stronger relationships, albeit adding tasks for table staff. Ideally, community partners engage with the market, possibly having their booth to promote their organization and deliver community programs.*

*Our warm welcome circle set the stage for a fantastic season!*

*Language: Many Mrkt Bucks customers, especially Asian immigrants, didn't speak English. Having Chinese-speaking volunteers earlier in the season proved highly beneficial to introduce the program and vendors. Future pilots should focus on intentional recruitment of language-speaking volunteers or partners, as well as creating language resources and communication tools to improve accessibility.*

*Redemption: While many participants attended the market weekly as intended, some accumulated Mrkt Bucks. As the expiration neared, there was a significant increase in redemption rates. This presented a challenge for vendors who typically plan inventory based on past sales. Future programs should consider creating incentives for regular attendance and understanding potential barriers to frequent market visits, addressing both vendor and participant needs for smoother operations.*

*Transportation: Due to changes in one market, we had to pivot and provide TTC passes to help with transportation costs. Participants were grateful and the other participants who were not eligible for the free TTC passes mentioned that they would appreciate tokens, too.*

*Vendor reimbursement can be time-consuming, necessitating on-site cash or internet access for e-transfers. Vendors should also be informed if reimbursement isn't immediate. Managing these processes demands significant time from market managers and is a major barrier for markets participating in such programs. Therefore, ensuring proper*

## WHAT WE DID

→ **Evaluation & Tracking:** Throughout the pilot, we tracked participants at markets, general comments from customers, sales, weather, and produce requests. Over the last two weeks of the program, we recorded interviews. We hosted an art-based activity at the Ontario Fresh Food Table where customers shared their thoughts and experiences with the program.

## WHAT WE LEARNT

*compensation for the market manager's administrative role is crucial for the program's long-term success.*

*A concluding program evaluation revealed residents' immense gratitude for the chance to partake and bring home locally grown, delightful fruits and vegetables they might not have otherwise enjoyed.*

*However, consistent evaluation, tracking and storytelling done thoughtfully takes time and resources. It needs to be integrated into a staff role as part-time youth staff, and market managers have limited capacity to support.*



Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks Table Top sign for participating vendors



\$5 Scarb TO Mrkt Bucks Card exchanged at vendor booth

## PROGRAM 3



# Ontario Fresh Food Table

Affordable, fresh, locally produced, culturally diverse, seasonal vegetables, fruits and other farm products are critical to a thriving neighbourhood markets. It is what residents want and deserve and what encourages customers to come back every week. Under the special event permit in the City of Toronto, the Farmers' Market requires that 51% of the vendors be direct producers. However, market managers, especially in newly established markets or low-income communities, struggle to secure enough farmers to participate, as daily sales might not cover the minimum a vendor requires to get to market.

Our pilot introduced a new market model focusing on urban entrepreneurs and an aggregate table exclusively for Ontario farm products.

Transparency was key in this model, as many customers asked if those attending the booth were farmers. Therefore, our booth had clear displays with the farm name, product origins and production practices.

To reduce startup costs and leverage existing local food infrastructure, we partnered with local food distributors, 100Km Foods and Grace and Gather, who already had distribution networks and connections with local farmers. This collaboration benefited 34 Ontario producers, providing increased sales at fair prices and access to a broader customer base.

We adopted a flexible approach, ordering produce weekly based on availability and customer feedback, mitigating risks typically associated with newly established markets. This allowed farmers to concentrate on increasing their growing capacity, particularly important for emerging BIPOC urban growers.

More importantly, it also allowed us to support rural and urban farmers' focus on niche agriculture or culturally specific ingredients, such as calaloo, bitter melon, Asian greens, and various hot peppers.

Our booth were managed by eight youths and one urban grower, most of whom lived in Scarborough or in the same neighborhood as the market, facilitating accessibility, community connection, and representation. Training covered various aspects, from healthy eating, food production, marketing, customer service, and booth logistics. Staff appreciated the opportunity and gained valuable insights into local food, sales, community development and the importance of building active and welcoming public spaces.

To minimize food waste, we partnered with local food banks to collect or receive unsold items at the end of each market day. Unfortunately, we couldn't accurately track the quantity donated due to the absence of a scale on-site.

Operating for 33 days, our booth generated total sales of \$14,579, with total expenses amounting to \$14,997. This first-year performance demonstrated that booth sales (including cash and Mrkt Bucks) could almost cover product costs. As the season progressed and customers sampled our products, both sales and traffic increased. The average basket size was \$11, considerably lower than the \$47 reported in the Greenbelt Report, reflecting our audience income and commitment.

In summary, our approach is a win-win-win situation: a win for producers, a win for customers, and a win for market managers!



# Snapshot Ontario Fresh Food Table Impact

➔ Program 3

## PARTNERS

Local Food Distributors

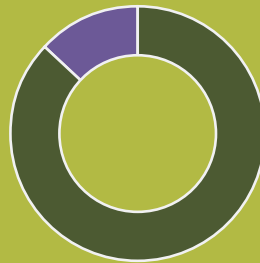


## EMPLOYMENT

8 Youth + 1 Urban Grower  
Employed at OFFT

Staff Employed at the OFFT by race

- BIPOC staff
- Other Staff



## 33 Urban & Rural Producers

Bee Universe + Helen Mana Urban Grower from Malvern Urban Farm

100Km Foods suppliers > Barrie Hill Farms; Cookstown Greens; Enviro Mushroom Farm; Fisherville Farms; Great Lakes Greenhouses; Hillside Gardens; Homestead Eggs; Lennox Farms; Mathias Farms; Ohme Famrs; Boston Springs Farms; St. David's Hydroponics; Tigchelaar Berry Farm; Top tomato Famrs; Twiss Famrs, Unionville Mushrooms; Warner's Farms; Welsh Bros Farms and Zephyr Organics.

Grace & Gather suppliers > Clearwater Farms; Cookstown Greens; Foragers Farms, City of Greens, Haystrom Farm, Harley Farms, Garlicloves; Kendal Hills Farm; Lunar Rhythm Farm; Millbrook Orchard; Palatine Fruit & Roses; Pinehaven; PRima ORchard and Weth Mushrooms.

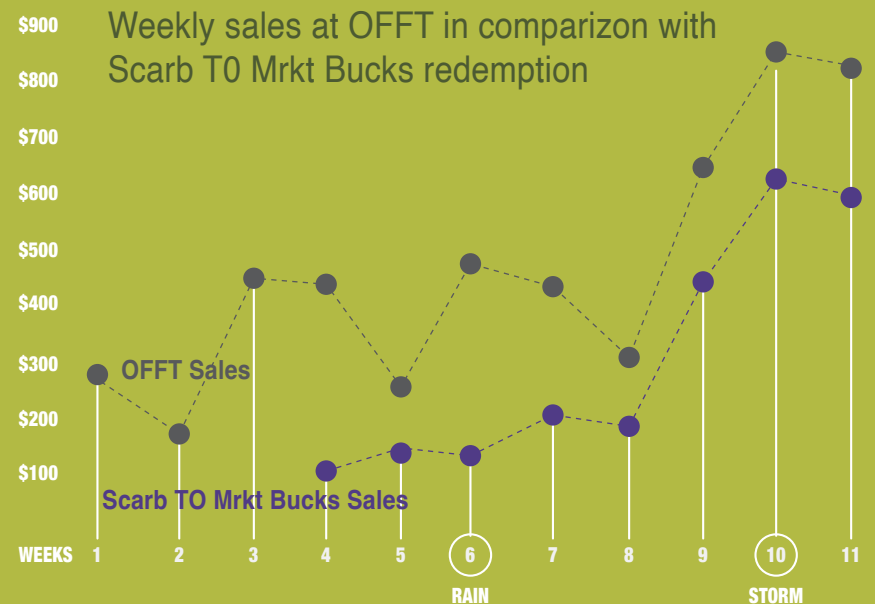
## SALES & NUMBERS

**\$14,570** Sales at the OFFT including Mrkt Bucks

**\$3,615** ScarbTO Mrkt Bucks used at the OFFT

**\$14,997** dollars spent in local produce **un sold produce is donated to Foodbanks**

**\$902** 40 e-transfers transactions **many credit card requests**



## WHAT WE DID

- Develop the Job description, recruitment, training and scheduling of 9 Staff for the OFT.
- Promotional materials (banner and tabletop signs).
- Engaged two partners in the distribution.
- Implemented the booth at five markets or 33 programming days.
- Organized weekly orders.
- Built partnerships with food banks to deliver any unsold fresh products aftermarket days.
- Mark-up at the Ontario Food Table was 10% over the wholesale price, making products more affordable than grocery stores.
- We sold diverse types of products ranging from conventional certified organic to ecological.

*“I learnt so much in just a few weeks, for example, the way that you organized the booth and arranged the products. I had never seen something like this before. It looks so beautiful when you see the table, you really want to buy it. That is something I did not expect to learn. Also, tracking, selling, being comfortable with the people, interacting with the kids that came to the market”*

*Youth employed at the OFFT*

*“I think the most important thing I learnt here is talking to people and making connections with customers. Being introverted really pushed me towards that goal of talking to people.”*

*Youth employed at the OFFT*

## WHAT WE LEARNED

- Customers appreciated the transparency and information about product origins and production practices, which is often lacking at grocery stores.
- They welcomed the diversity of products, especially heirloom varieties not commonly found in supermarkets. The farm-fresh eggs and honey were particularly popular, often selling out.
- Over 75% of our sales were in cash or via e-transfer, highlighting strong local interest in locally produced food, especially organic options.
- Many customers also requested credit card payment or e-transfer options, suggesting the need for online payment methods in future pilots.
- Efficient product delivery to the market location proved effective, but planning for pick-up or dedicated vehicles is necessary, as market managers and food banks cannot handle this task.
- Finding storage for tents, frames, and tables at market locations is ideal to streamline operations.
- To minimize waste and efficiently manage inventory, consecutive markets throughout the week are recommended.
- Managing the Ontario Fresh Food Table requires a dedicated team, with the market manager ideally involved but not solely responsible, as it involves significant organization and coordination alongside the market itself.

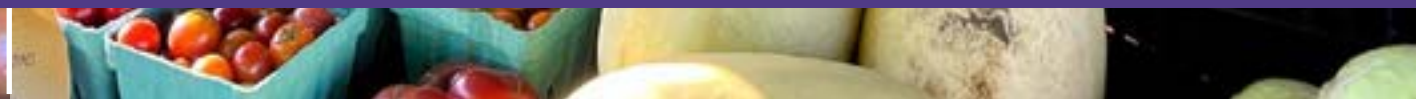




Sample of produce signadage at the Ontario Fresh Food Table



Jamie, Olivia and Astan, the Ontario Food Table Team at Courtyard Farmers' Market



## FINAL REFLECTIONS

The 2022 pilot was a success on so many levels. We saw customers regularly come to the market and enjoy the fresh produce and the experience of connecting with other community members. Feedback from vendors was also highly positive, as they saw an increase in traffic; the vendors who participated in the Market Bucks Program saw up to a 20% increase in their sales. Community partners helping with the Scarb Mrkt Bucks Program, especially food banks, provided their clients with fresh and delicious local ingredients. Local food distributors, 100km Foods and Grace and Gather, and their producers opened new sales channels— they also felt honoured to be part of a solution that links food insecure residents to local food.

Jennifer Forde and Marina Queirolo worked hard on this pilot and are excited by what we achieved in such a short time. Our goal is to continue expanding the program in Scarborough and across the city. We look forward to continuing our work with community partners, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, and the City of Toronto.

## REFERENCES

- 1 - City of Toronto (2020) Main Streets. The current state and future of Toronto retail. City Economic Development and Culture Division. Three Sixty Collective. Downtown Yonge BIA. The Creva Group. hRz Research Insights. Peter Tomlinson Consulting
- 2 - City of Toronto (2020) Main Streets. The current state and future of Toronto retail. City Economic Development and Culture Division. Three Sixty Collective. Downtown Yonge BIA. The Creva Group. hRz Research Insights. Peter Tomlinson Consulting



Agabe Farms exchanging Mrkt Bucks at St. Andrews' Church Harvest Market

Right: Notes from customers providing feedback from their experience at the end of the pilot

Hello Kind Person/Family  
These cards have helped  
my family get fresh fruit  
and vegetables - allowing us  
to be as healthy as possible  
I have lung cancer and  
my daughters also have  
illnesses. My one daughter

What I liked about  
here it was amazing  
and I liked the corn  
it was amazing I  
hope I can come  
back next year

Thankyou so much  
Market Bucks Program  
It was a very nice experience  
for me and my family  
Judy

I am very grateful for  
Scrub to Market Bucks  
without this I cant  
afford vegetables!  
Every bit helps  
Thank you

Thank you 5000  
much for our  
market. Not  
only are the  
produce THE BEST  
but so is all the staff  
haven't tasted real  
produce like this  
cant wait for next  
year

This is very good  
Program & very useful  
to the customers, to  
get fresh fruits & vegetables  
Good if it is continue, there  
will benefit new customers &  
customers.  
Many Thanks!

I Love The  
Farm  
Market  
I Love Pickin  
corn

Very happy one all  
with the help from  
market + scrubs.  
Thank you  
Cynthia

Hello Kind Person/Family  
These cards have helped  
my family get fresh fruit  
and vegetables - allowing us  
to be as healthy as possible  
I have lung cancer and  
my daughters also have  
illnesses. My one daughter

I'm Diabetic  
& Small have  
enough food  
on ODSP with  
this program  
Love Love love



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Agape Farms culturally diverse produce offering  
at St. Andrew's Anglican Church Harvest Market