



## SERIES 4

Building on previous research on local food procurement, this series is celebrating local food champions and their commitment to supporting Ontario's agri-food sector.

# LOCAL FOOD CHAMPIONS: FACES BEHIND OUR FOOD



**PROFILING:**  
**KAREN HUTCHINSON**  
CULTIVATING SYSTEM CHANGE THROUGH LOCAL FOOD

Written and Designed by  
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# LOCAL FOOD CHAMPIONS

## KAREN HUTCHINSON

Cultivating System Change Through Local Food



"I always remember my dad would create on the farm a space where we could learn by doing. Sometimes it didn't go as well as expected but it built self-reliance"

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Raised on a dairy farm, Karen Hutchinson combines her passion for food, lived experience and thoughtful leadership to the local food movement. Karen's education in Social Innovation at the University of Waterloo and a Masters' program at York University provided her with a foundation in systems thinking, policy awareness, and interdisciplinary problem-solving. These tools have informed her ability to see food as an interconnected web of land, economics, health, and community wellbeing.

Hutchinson has applied a food systems lens through the creation and support of many regional and local food initiatives. Early on, in 2009, she helped launch Eat Local Caledon which brought residents, farmers, businesses and community organizations together and helped inspire broader Eat Local campaigns across Ontario.

As a founder of the Albion Hills Community Farm in 2010, her work has continued to include community-focused program development and partnerships with local organizations, government and businesses supporting workshops, events and initiatives that further strengthen local food connections while building a sense of community. Education and food literacy remain central to Hutchinson's work, particularly her commitment to experiential learning.



" WE KNOW THAT WHEN WE TEACH KIDS EARLY AND YOUNG, GIVING THEM HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE, WE KNOW THIS WILL STICK WITH THEM FOR A LONG TIME AND THIS IS A REALLY GOOD PLACE TO INTERVENE AND HELP RE-INTRODUCE THE OLD FASHION FOOD AND GARDENING SKILLS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM"



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“It is about gathering people who are interested in food and bringing that energy together on projects and programs for the kids”

**She was instrumental in driving the Caledon School Vegetable Garden Network, which now includes 16+ school gardens across all Caledon public schools. This initiative would not be possible without support in the field, the community, school board and school trustees like Stan Cameron at PDSB. “It is about gathering people who are interested in food and bringing that energy together on projects and programs for the kids” explains Hutchinson.**

**The Caledon Crunch – reintroduced after a hiatus during Covid – has returned to Caledon schools due to Karen’s initiative. Students from Caledon’s public schools bite into a Caledon grown apple during Ontario Agriculture Week and Canada’s Farm to School Month right before Thanksgiving to celebrate fresh food, healthy eating and agriculture as part of food literacy.**

**Karen’s energy has supported edible education, which connects schools and community partners to advance hands-on, curriculum-linked food learning in Peel Region and Headwaters Region. She is proud her involvement of the long-term project Albion Hills Community Farm where there are now 60 allotment gardens, a 1.5 acre market garden, field crops, bees, chickens and engagement and education programs. Hutchinson has also helped develop programs in Caledon that bring families, volunteers, and community partners together for farm experiences.**



Working with the Palgrave United Community Kitchen has enabled transforming farm-grown produce into value-added products like salsa and zucchini brownies while teaching food skills and demonstrating the full journey from field to plate. Working with farm board volunteers, summer youth team and close community partners like Headwaters Food and Farming Alliance and the Kitchen makes all of this work possible.

Karen’s lasting legacy is as a connector, builder, and systems thinker around food. Her work continues to demonstrate that meaningful food system change happens when people learn together, build together, and recognize food as a shared responsibility—and a powerful tool for creating resilient, connected communities. “There really is a place for everyone”, she adds with a smile.



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