



**Canadian Centre  
for Food & Ecology**

Impact Report  
2024-2025

# Healthy food, healthy planet

## OUR VISION AND MISSION

Our vision is a future where food is valued as a social good and local, regenerative food economies are the beating heart of our food system.



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

# Leading with taste and joy



Above from left to right, the CCFE team; Alan, Zahra, Kate, Sarah and Lindsey tending Alan's rooftop garden.

## Cheap food is not cheap.

The world spends \$10 trillion a year on food and \$20 trillion a year fixing the resulting health and environmental problems — from diabetes and heart disease to soil degradation, water pollution, and climate change.

But growing food locally in healthy soil can reverse virtually every problem caused by the current system. This approach creates cleaner water, promotes biodiversity, and sequesters carbon. It also produces food with significantly more nutrients and better flavour.

Until now, efforts to strengthen local food economies have focused on the supply side, encouraging more regenerative ways to grow food. But to create change, we also need to drive demand for better, healthier food. After all, why would a farmer change their approach if there's no market?

Drawing on my background as a consumer marketer, I wanted to unleash the power of demand. And when it comes to food, I've learned that guilt and fear don't work as motivators to change buying choices. What motivates people is taste.

I saw it firsthand with the rooftop garden I built. My friends would sample whatever I was growing — whether it was lettuce, a carrot, or a hakurei turnip. And every time, they'd declare it was the best they've ever had.

I realized that this was the way to open the conversation.

That's why I launched the Canadian Centre for Food & Ecology. It also led me to recruit Sarah Heynen — a seasoned leader and change-maker who isn't afraid to think big.

I'm proud of what she and the rest of our team have accomplished over the past two years. Together, we've won the trust of the sector, giving us a place at the table at major events and high-level discussions. At the same time, our pilot projects have proved that joyful, taste-based experiences really can change people's behaviour.

We've laid the foundations. Now, I'm excited to scale up those successes alongside partners who share our vision of a healthier, more resilient, and flavourful food system.

**Alan Levine**  
Founder and Chair

Established in 2024, the Canadian Centre for Food & Ecology (CCFE) is a national charity working to transform Canada's food system to improve human health, ecological health, and community resilience.

Across the country, there are people committed to growing, cooking, and providing local, regeneratively grown food, forming the roots of local food economies.

We believe that strengthening these economies is the key to a more resilient food system — one that restores nature, protects the climate, improves nutrition and well-being, and builds thriving communities.

The bigger and louder the demand is for a system that values food as a social good, the stronger local food economies will become. That's why CCFE's mission is to educate and mobilize Canadians in support of a healthy food system that works in harmony with nature.

## OUR APPROACH

### **Shift behaviour with taste and joy.**

We apply behaviour science to shift food choices, leading with taste and joy.

### **Build a groundswell of demand for local foods.**

We are the only organization in Canada laser-focused on the demand side of this challenge, targeting socially influential groups to drive broader change.

### **Regenerate local food economies as value-rich alternatives to the current food system.**

### **Nurture healthy ecosystems and communities.**



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Embracing food as a social good

At the Canadian Centre for Food & Ecology, we're participating in a paradigm shift — one that moves us from understanding food as a commodity to embracing food as a social good.

This means rethinking not only how food is produced and consumed but also how it connects us to one another and to the earth that sustains us.

We started this journey by listening. We opened ourselves to the wisdom of farmers, food entrepreneurs, community leaders, and advocates, seeking to understand where they saw gaps, opportunities, and cautions. We came with the belief that the solutions are already all around us and that our challenge is to build demand for them.

**“**We are all connected. Every act of collective work grounded in joy and the recognition of food as a social good is itself systemic change. By creating experiences that connect people to one another, to food, and to the earth, we are shifting the system from the inside out.”

To do that, we focus on two dimensions of what drives behaviour. At the individual level, we use behavioural sciences and OneEarth Living's proven market segmentation model to better understand what motivates people and how change happens. At the collective level, we pay close attention to the wider culture — the unseen, ingrained, and automatic forces that shape our food choices every day.

Over the past two years, our pilot projects have validated our proof of concept: that leading with taste and joyful engagement can increase demand for healthy, local food produced in harmony with nature. In doing so, we've developed strong, replicable models that give us confidence as we move forward.

Our aim is to provide a strong, enabling core that attracts resources, cultivates collaboration across the food system, and co-creates solutions with partners.

That kind of teamwork is everything to me. And I feel fortunate that we're supported by a small but mighty staff, wise and generous advisors, and incredible partners. That includes the pilot project partners who made our inaugural Flavour Harvest programs possible, as well as collaborators like the Centre for Social Innovation and The Dépanneur, who will help us develop our next chapter.

Systemic change is happening now. It unfolds as we unsettle the myth on which the system relies, that we are separate, and replace it with the truth: we are all connected. Every act of collective work grounded in joy and the recognition of food as a social good is itself systemic change. By creating experiences that connect people to one another, to food, and to the earth, we are shifting the system from the inside out.

**Sarah Heynen**  
Executive Director

## GOAL

To prove that engaging Canadians in joyful, taste-based experiences can inspire food choices that nurture people and the planet

## THE BIRTH OF FLAVOUR HARVEST

**In 2024, we launched our inaugural “Flavour Harvest” pilot at The Sweet Potato grocery stores in Toronto. The program brought together a values-aligned retailer, a regenerative produce supplier, Pfenning Organic Farms, and a trusted community leader, Healthy Moms, to reach parents of toddlers and preschoolers—encouraging them to try locally grown organic carrots. Designed as a proof-of-concept pilot, the initiative served as a key learning experience, helping validate our model while generating insights we could build on to strengthen future programs.**

## UNEARTHING MOTIVATIONS FOR BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

**In the weeks leading up to our main two-day event, we tested the effectiveness of three different messages in invitations sent to the Healthy Moms email list. Each message emphasized a different aspect of healthy, organic food: flavour, sustainability, and nutrition content.**



## Proving our concept: Flavour Harvest 2024

**Messages were also tested in-store where customers could sample carrot products. By tracking customer engagement and carrot sales, we could measure how well each message motivated shoppers.**

**In both email outreach and in-store, the nutrition message performed best, confirming that nutrition is a strong entry point for initial interest.**

**However, the deeper shift happened once people tasted the food. During the event, shoppers sampled carrot dishes and took part in hands-on activities designed to delight both**

**parents and children. It was the flavour — not the nutrition messaging — that converted curiosity into enthusiasm and purchase.**

**Participants were moved by what they learned, as reported through post event surveys, and backed up by sales data which surged during the pilot and remained elevated for months afterwards, reinforcing a key learning: nutrition messaging can attract attention, but taste-based experiences are what ultimately drive engagement and lasting behaviour change.**

**Nutrition messaging can attract attention, but taste-based experiences are what ultimately drive engagement and lasting behaviour change.**

## Building a framework for powerful partnerships

Changing the food system requires collective effort. So, for our first pilot, we set out to build key partnerships.

The **Healthy Moms** network of nearly 20,000 engaged parents offered a perfect conduit to our target audience of eco-trenders (eco-minded and socially motivated individuals) with young children. **The Sweet Potato** — an independent Toronto grocer with a deep commitment to local, organic, and affordable food — provided a retail location to host our intervention.

Both partners cared about creating a healthy food system that sustains people and the planet. But players in the sustainable food space are often forced by circumstance to see each other as competitors vying for a small slice of the same consumer pie.

As planning got underway, concerns emerged. How would their different contributions be valued? How would the project contribute to each of their success?

*“Collaboration is easy to say and actually really hard to do,”* says CCFE’s Lindsey Boyle.

To answer these questions, we facilitated open, transparent conversations and hammered out approaches that met each partner’s needs, with the aim of ensuring that both partners felt they were getting more out of the experience than they were putting in.

That hard work paved the way for a successful pilot. It also led to the creation of CCFE’s partnership principles. Because to change the way food systems work, we need to foster collaborations that create mutual thriving — more than growing the pie, we’re building a bakery that benefits everyone.



“For us it starts with the soil, but for consumers it starts with taste. The value of our partnership with the CCFE has been in the opportunity to collaborate to create meaningful taste experiences for a new, younger audience.”

Jessica Wynne-Pfenning, Sustainability Specialist  
Pfenning’s Organic Farms

### PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

## Pfenning’s Organic Farms



The Pfenning family produces more organic carrots than anyone else in Ontario. Since 1981, they’ve been growing organic vegetables on their 700-acre New Hamburg farm. Today, that includes more than 40 crops: everything from arugula to zucchini.

But most of all, they grow carrots renowned for exceptional sweetness and nutritional content, thanks to soil nourished with compost, cover crops, and careful crop rotation.

*“Soil that’s nurtured... is going to produce fruits and vegetables that are more nutrient dense, more flavourful, better for the family that’s taking it home, as*

*well as more pest and drought resistant,”* explains Jessica Wynne-Pfenning.

That made their carrots the perfect “hero food” for CCFE’s inaugural Flavour Harvest pilot. For Pfenning’s, participating provided an opportunity to tell their story and deepen their connection with customers. For customers, it was an opportunity to discover just how good food can taste when it’s grown in ways that nurture both people and planet.

Above: crops at the Pfenning’s farm. Inset: where it all began, Barnhild, Wilhelm, Wolfgang and Gertrud, selling their produce.

## Flavour Harvest 2024 key achievements:

### 900+

Our in-store tastings engaged 900+ parents and children

### Two-thirds

of participants returned to shop again



Sales of Pfenning’s carrots remained elevated months after the campaign

### 73%

of participants reported an ongoing shift in their purchasing behaviour more than two months later

# Research-Driven Programs that target motivations

## TARGETING INFLUENTIAL AUDIENCES

We know targeted messaging is far more effective than a one-size-fits-all approach. But who is our audience?

For our Flavour Harvest pilots, we wanted to reach a receptive target demographic that just needed a little nudge to shift their food-buying habits. To do that, we used OneEarth Living’s proven market segmentation model, zeroing in on a group known as “eco-trenders.”

These individuals care about doing the right thing and are likely to take sustainability-focused actions when given the right motivation. And because they love sharing what they learn, when inspired, they amplify the message and help bring others along.



### PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

## Dr. Kate White

Thanks to research and insights from University of British Columbia behavioural scientist Dr. Kate White, we knew that shifting buying habits isn’t easy.

*“We often see a real disconnect between what people say they’re going to do and what they actually do,” she explains. “People often state, ‘I want to be sustainable and I want to be healthy.’ But when you look at their actual behaviours, they don’t always follow suit.”*

That’s why testing behavioural nudges is important. As a CCFE advisor, White helped us test our 2024 Flavour Harvest in-store messages — and she continues to guide our ongoing work.



## Scaling our Model: Flavour Harvest 2025

### GOAL

Address key barriers to shopping at local farmers markets, including peoples’ feelings of uncertainty about how to use produce and their discomfort engaging with vendors

In 2025, we used Flavour Harvest pop-ups at Toronto’s Sorare, Dufferin Grove, and Deeply Rooted farmers’ markets as living labs to observe and learn what drives engagement. Working closely with market managers, vendors, and community engagement experts at Reset, we designed flavour-forward experiences including seasonal samples, taste tests, a guided audio journey and nutrient density demonstrations that encouraged people to explore, ask questions, and try new produce.

As visitors engaged, we captured real-time insights into what built confidence and led to purchasing and vendor interaction. We then shared these learnings with our market partners and their vendors, offering practical, actionable ways to improve engagement and increase sales of local produce.

But the value in these learnings extended well beyond our market community. In partnership with farmer Sarah Dolamore of Mount Wolfe Farm, one of our spotlighted vendors, we

brought these insights to the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario fall conference. Together, we paired our findings with her firsthand experience, including how Flavour Harvest programming helped sell out her hakurei turnips, a product many shoppers had previously overlooked until they experienced its flavour at the booth.

Clockwise: Flavour seekers at Dufferin Grove Market. Vibrant Kale Salad samples. Willing participants queue up at our Flavour Harvest stand. The sell-out hakurei turnips.

**Flavour Harvest programming helped sell out hakurei turnips, a product many shoppers previously overlooked until they experienced its flavour at the booth.**

# Flavour Harvest 2025 key achievements:

## 10,500

We engaged nearly 10,500 people, providing 9,000+ samples made from seasonal, market-fresh ingredients.

## 68%

of participants said they valued local food more as a result, and many purchased more than they had initially intended.

## Three-quarters

of respondents felt more connected and said they were very likely to return to the market.

## 32%

of participating farmers sold out of the featured produce.



### PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

## Dufferin Grove Market

Since 2002, Dufferin Grove Market has been a hub for community connection and sustainably grown food. In 2025, they partnered with CCFE to host a Flavour Harvest pop-up creating new entry points for shoppers to engage with vendors, try different produce samples and generate insights on what drives engagement.

Vendors reported increased sales on dates that their produce was spotlighted, with numerous vendors selling out of the highlighted items. These outcomes helped surface a key insight: when shoppers experience the flavour of

unfamiliar ingredients in a low-pressure, fun way, they are far more likely to feel confident engaging with vendors.

As Dufferin Grove Market Manager Nicole Jacobs observed: *“People [were] excited. They [were] trying new things, getting curious. Which is what we want at farmers’ markets. We want people to be curious. We want people to take chances.”*

Nicole pictured holding a massive arugula “bouquet” from market vendor, Nature’s Way Organics.

# Establishing CCFE as a trusted partner

There are many great organizations in Canada working to make the food system healthier and more resilient. Our goal is not to duplicate their efforts. Rather, we want to fill the gaps and serve as a connector to catalyze collective impact. So when we launched CCFE in 2024, one of our first priorities was cultivating the trust of potential partners and collaborators.

### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

CCFE participated in the **federal government’s 2025 pre-budget consultations** alongside other social impact leaders.

**Regenerative Food Systems Investment** invited us to partner on their inaugural 2024 online conference, focused on accelerating capital for regenerative agriculture and food-system enterprises in Canada.

We presented our work at **no fewer than six leading ecosystem conferences, panels, and educational events**, reaching change-makers across Canada.

The Greater Purpose Awards named us a **finalist for the Innovative Impact Partnership Award** in recognition of our collaboration with Pfenning’s Organic Farms, The Sweet Potato, and Healthy Moms to inspire more delicious, local and sustainable food choices.

# Looking forward

Our first two years were dedicated to planting the seeds of food system change, proving we can drive demand for healthy, regeneratively grown produce.

We developed, tested, validated, and refined our Flavour Harvest programs. We grew and strengthened strategic networks and partnerships. We secured the funding needed to support future growth.

This foundational work has positioned CCFE to move confidently into the next phase of our journey.

In 2026, we're commencing work on a Local Food Economy Regenerator in the Greater Toronto Bioregion to scale our reach and impact. In partnership with the Centre for Social Innovation, this first Regenerator will catalyze regional collaborations to co-create year-round, taste-based programs grounded in behavioural science and audience insight.

Our goal is to establish a replicable, financially sustainable, bio-regionally grounded model that serves as a living lab for innovation.

Ultimately, we plan to expand this model to other bioregions across Canada, increasing awareness of — and access to — nutritious, regeneratively grown foods. Each of these Regenerators will:

### Serve as hubs

connecting producers and suppliers with individuals and communities

### Foster innovative partnerships

to design and deliver seasonal, taste-forward programming such as events, activations, and workplace offerings

### Build public awareness,

understanding, access, and appetite for foods that taste better because they're grown better

### Strengthen relationships

between local eaters and the people and businesses that power their local food economy

## OUR 2024-2025 PARTNERS

# Thank you to our partners, and all growers and foodpreneurs working to build thriving local food economies across Canada

Transforming our food system takes collective effort. We are deeply grateful to all of those across the food ecosystem who show up every day, often working against the current, to grow, share and advocate for food that nourishes both people and the planet.

Together, we can make sustainable choices easier and shift the demand that shapes Canada's food system.

**Together, we can inspire food choices that nourish people, nurture nature, and move toward a healthier, more resilient food system for all.**

# 2025 Financials

**Expenses: \$955,849**

**Administration: \$113,265**

Salaries and labour	\$69,098
General and administrative	\$10,083
Professional services	\$27,524
Training and professional development	\$6,560

**Programs: \$815,428**

Salaries and labour	\$627,005
Program delivery	\$65,159
Marketing and communications	\$88,833
Training and professional development	\$4,955

**Fundraising: \$27,156**

Salaries and labour	\$27,156
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**11.8%**  
Administration

**2.8%**  
Fundraising

**85.3%**  
Programs

**Income:  
\$994,828**

**Expenses:  
\$955,849**

**Profit and  
Loss by Class**

January 1-December 31, 2025

**Surplus:  
\$38,979**



# CCFE Canadian Centre for Food & Ecology

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