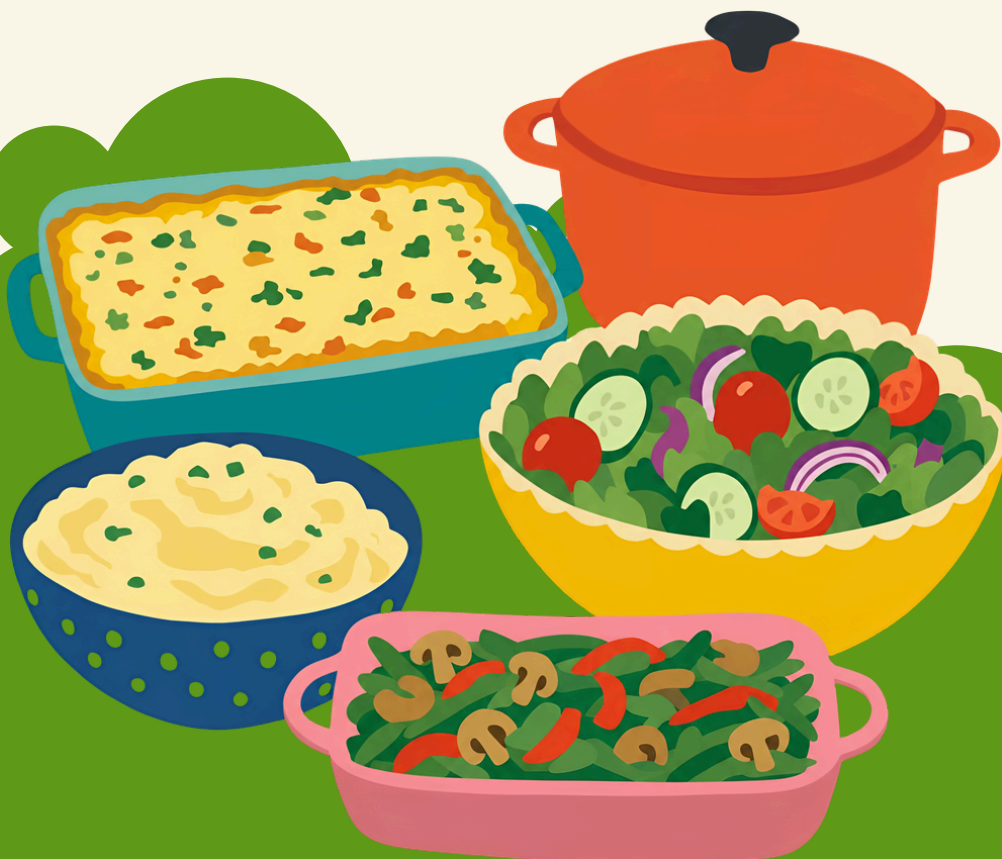


BEYOND THE PLATE

A Community Meal Guide for Prince Edward County



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What is a Community Meal?

A community meal is an open, lively gathering where people share food together, ideally on a regular basis. These events are often free or pay-what-you-can, and they work best when they are genuinely open to everyone, not just those who need it most.

Done well, a community meal does more than feed people. It builds connection, reduces isolation, and creates a space where people from different circumstances can sit together without anyone knowing why each person showed up. Done with intention, it also does food systems work: modelling local purchasing, plant-forward eating, and dignified food access in ways that ripple outward over time.

This guide is written for the full range of groups doing food security related work in the County: food banks and frontline emergency food providers, youth-serving organizations who sense food insecurity without needing to ask, food hubs and collectives.





Why This Guide?



If you're holding this guide, you already know something most people outside this work don't: a free meal is not automatically a welcome one.

Across the County, agencies and grassroots groups host community meals with real generosity and real intention, to build connection, to ease hunger, to bring people together at a shared table. These are good instincts.

But research on food insecurity tells us something troubling: the people most in need of a free meal are often the least likely to walk through the door. Being seen at a "handout" event carries a weight that many people, quietly and reasonably, choose to avoid. Stigma, not the food itself, is often what determines whether someone joins or stays home.

That's the paradox at the centre of this guide: a well-attended community meal and a successful one are not always the same thing.

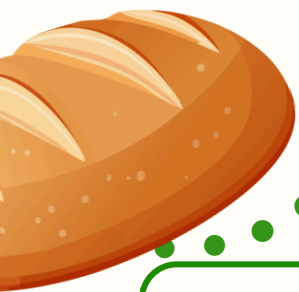
There's a second layer specific to a place like ours. Prince Edward County is rural, with deep agrarian roots, and is under real gentrification pressure. Farm-to-fork dining has high social currency here, and the instinct to bring in a notable chef or an elevated menu can read as generosity from the organizer's side of the table. For someone already navigating food insecurity, it can quietly raise the bar for who feels they belong in the room. The feeling, rarely anyone's intention, can simply be: *I don't belong here.*

The County has pockets of *food desert* conditions, with 26,868 residents spread across 1,050 km², 77% of them living rurally. Limited transit, car-dependent geography, and a high concentration of seniors in outlying areas compound this. For someone elderly in North Marysburgh without a car in January, the distance between a grocery store and an empty refrigerator can be measured in kilometres of icy road. The County is also *internet-famous* for its food culture, a place where food is visibly present and celebrated. And yet that abundance remains functionally out of reach for many who cannot afford to access it. That is the definition of a *food mirage*.



**"A well-attended community meal
and a successful one are not always
the same thing."**





Food System Work

In the spirit of long-term change, this guide asks something more of a **community meal** than to feed people. It asks the meal to also do **food systems work**: quietly, structurally, in the choices an organizer makes before plates go out. Some of that work includes where the food is sourced, whether the same care goes into a lentil stew as a roast, and whether the menu assumes everyone in the room eats the same way.

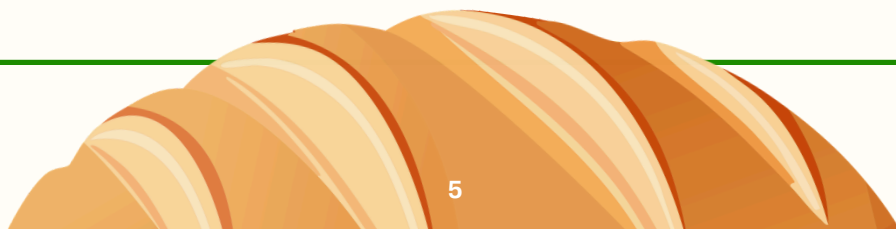
Food systems work is not flag-waving. It is informed by research and evidence, and it aims toward something larger than a good meal: healing and slowly reengineering a food system that is inequitable, ecologically costly, and increasingly fragile. **A community meal, done with intention, is a small but real act within that larger project.**

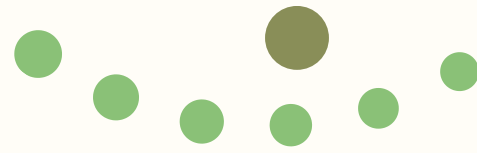
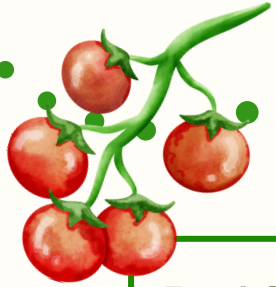
Definitions

Food Security means all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their preferences and needs for an active, healthy life, obtained in a way that maintains dignity.

Food Insecurity exists within a household when one or more members do not have access to the variety or quantity of food that they need due to lack of money.

Dignified Food Access means providing quality food choices in a respectful way, in welcoming places, without marking people as recipients of charity.





Food Systems Work connects how food is grown, processed, distributed, consumed, and disposed of. When any part of that system is inequitable, ecologically damaging, or fragile, the effects are felt most sharply by people who are already vulnerable.

Food systems work means making deliberate choices across sourcing, preparation, and service that model a more equitable, sustainable, and dignified food culture. It is not advocacy. It is practice, repeated consistently, in small decisions that add up.

Gentrification is a process of community change where higher-income and higher-educated residents move to a historically marginalized neighborhood. Housing costs and community is physically transformed through high-end construction and cultural character shifts. The impacts can displace or squeeze resources of vulnerable residents.

Food Desert refers to a geographic area where residents have limited access to affordable, nutritious food due to distance, transportation barriers, and income constraints.

Food Mirage describes a condition where food is visibly present and even abundant in a community but remains financially or socially out of reach for food-insecure residents.

Food Literacy is a set of interconnected skills and knowledge that help people understand, access, and engage critically with food and food systems. A community meal, done well, is food literacy in action.



The Five A's of Food Security

Food security is not only about whether food exists. The Five A's framework, breaks the concept into its working parts.

Availability

There is a sufficient, consistent supply of food for all people at all times, whether grown locally or imported.

Accessibility

People have both the physical and financial means to acquire the food they need.

Adequacy

The food available is safe, nutritious, and meets dietary needs while being produced in environmentally sustainable ways.

Acceptability

Food respects cultural and personal preferences and is acquired and consumed in ways that uphold human dignity and human rights.

Agency

Communities have the policies, processes, and control to make decisions about their own food systems

A breakdown in any single A can cascade into food insecurity, even when the others appear intact.



A community with plenty of available, affordable food can still leave residents food insecure if that food is not culturally acceptable to them, or if accessing it costs them their dignity.



In PEC, it can be the combination of accessibility gaps, distance, limited transit, gas money, with acceptability failures that keeps people from the table.



Good Food Philosophy

A community meal is an act of care. The food served, the way it is sourced, the way the room is set up, and the way people are welcomed all communicate something about who the meal is for and what the hosts believe about the people they are serving.

Food should be good.

Not just safe and filling, but genuinely well-made, from real ingredients, prepared with care. People experiencing food insecurity deserve the same quality of food as anyone else. Second-rate donations do not belong on a community meal table.

Food should be local and seasonal where possible.

County food, grown nearby, harvested at ripeness, tastes better. It also supports the farms and farmers who are part of this community. Buying local is not a luxury. It is a choice that keeps money, relationships, and food quality in the region.

Food should lean toward plants and model healthful eating.

Canada's Food Guide has shifted. The evidence is clear: a meal built around vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, with meat as an accent rather than the centre, is better for people and better for the planet. This guide recommends making plant-forward eating part of the default, without making it the announcement.

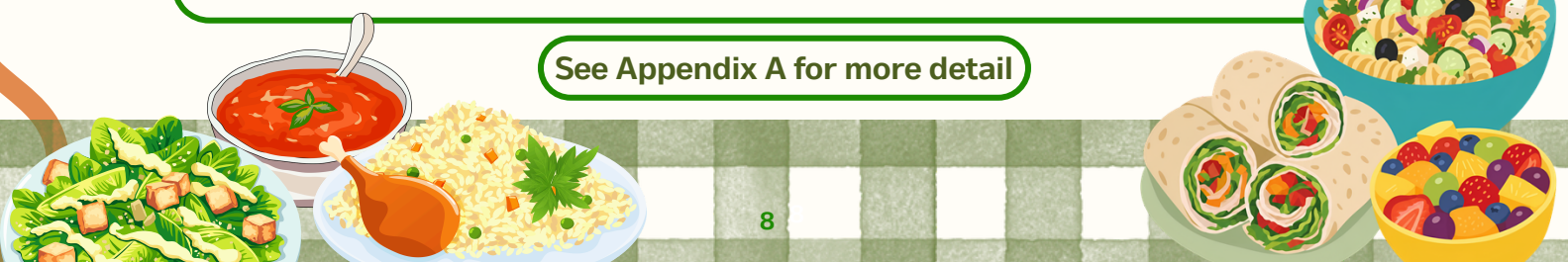
Food should be culturally responsive.

The County is more diverse than it first appears. A menu that never changes, never questions its assumptions, and never reflects anyone outside one cultural default is not neutral. It is a missed opportunity at best.

Food should be prepared with others, not just for them.

The prep kitchen is where the real work happens. Involving community members in cooking, not just serving, is what separates a community meal from a charity event.

See Appendix A for more detail



Planning Your Meal

WHO?

Before planning a meal, get clear on who it is for and who it will realistically reach. These are not always the same group.

- Who in your community would benefit most from a regular, free or low-cost meal?
- How will you reach them? Through existing programs, word of mouth, posted flyers, partner organizations, community animators?
- Who in your volunteer base has cooking experience, and who needs a supported entry point?
- Are there community members who might want to be involved in planning, not just attending?
- Equity considerations matter here. The people most likely to benefit are often the least likely to show up to something new and unfamiliar. Design for them first, not last.

WHEN & WHERE?

Timing and location are key decisions, and community meals don't have to mean dinner. Breakfast and lunch gatherings can be equally powerful, and may better suit certain audiences: seniors, school-age children, shift workers. Consider what time of day creates the most genuine access for the people you most want to reach.

A meal held only in Picton misses residents in outlying wards with limited transit. Ask community partners to circulate offers to drive. A meal held in a space that requires stairs excludes people with mobility needs.

Questions to ask:

- Is the location accessible to those who would benefit most, including people without cars?
- Is the timing realistic for people who work variable or shift hours?
- Is the space large enough, warm enough, and genuinely welcoming?
- Is there a cooking area that can safely support the scale you're planning?
- Who is responsible for setting up and cleanup?

HOW?

Preparation is everything. The key to a large-scale community meal is a clear timeline and well-briefed volunteers.

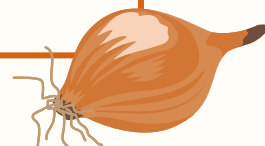
- **Six weeks out:** Confirm your space, date, and any permits or food safety requirements.
- **Four weeks out:** Begin outreach. Confirm your kitchen lead and key volunteers. Reach out to local farmers or market vendors if local sourcing is part of your plan.
- **Two weeks out:** Finalize the menu. Leave room for seasonal substitutions and donated additions. Confirm at least one dish that flexes for different dietary needs without calling attention to itself.
- **One week out:** Send reminder outreach. Confirm any local food orders or pickups. Assign volunteer tasks matched to ability.
- **The week of:** Shop for what local sourcing didn't cover. Brief volunteers on their roles and the menu. Think through the room: how will people enter, where will they sit, what will the space communicate?

INVOLVING YOUR COMMUNITY

Community dinners provide an opportunity to do things *with* people, not just *for* them. Invite community members into the planning process, not just the eating. Ask what they want on the menu. Incorporate volunteer recipes where possible. Treat community food knowledge that walks through your door as an asset, not an obstacle.

Consider whether there are activities, conversations, or other programming that could accompany the meal. A shared table is already a starting point for connection. Other elements can build on that without overwhelming it.

"I absolutely love volunteering at the Community Meals! They offer our community the opportunity to socialize, connect and share history and culture, and I get to interact with my community, my neighbours and meet new residents in the area."



Designing the Room and the Experience

Ask before every meal: *Who do we expect? Who do we hope will come but hasn't? What would make the room feel like it was made for them?*

How the room is set up, how people are greeted, and how food is served all carry meaning. Taken together they communicate whether this meal was made for the people in it, or merely available to them.

The line between those who give food and those who receive it, left intact, can do harm. It marks people, even unintentionally, as belonging to one side or the other. A room where a volunteer, a board member, and someone facing food insecurity could be seated together, and a newcomer couldn't tell which was which, is the goal.

There is no single correct format for achieving this. A buffet, done well, offers choice and self-determination. No one watches what goes on your plate. A plated meal, done well, offers the dignity of being cared for. Both can serve dignity. Both can undermine it. The question before every meal is not "buffet or plated?" It is: what does dignity look like for the people in this specific room, on this specific night?

Some practical anchors:

- ⬇ Greet people by name, or warmly, at the door.
- ⬇ Entry should be non-stigmatizing. No visible sorting. No means-testing.
- ⬇ Scatter service areas so conspicuous food lines are minimized.
- ⬇ Involve community members in setup, prep, and serving, not just attendance.
- ⬇ Decor and signage should read as a gathering place, not a service window.
- ⬇ Volunteers sit and eat with community members.
- ⬇ Venues should meet basic accessibility standards: ramps, wide aisles, seating for varying mobility needs.

Consider posting a simple, appealing sign that describes the meal: what's in it, where key ingredients came from, what makes it good. Done with warmth and good design, this normalizes unfamiliar dishes, creates conversation, and signals that real thought went into the food. It is also an opportunity to build gentle curiosity around less familiar ingredients, without announcing them as a health intervention.

Inclusivity is not a single decision. It is a habit of attention applied to who is in the room, who isn't, and why. Programs that build in flexibility and choice, rather than visibly marking who is receiving charity, see higher participation from the people most in need. Inclusivity is about program structure, cultural responsiveness, physical accessibility, and guest agency. All of these matter.

Leading the Kitchen

The food lead in a community meal kitchen is a different kind of leader entirely, one whose authority is measured not by what they alone can produce, but by what they can help make possible for others in the kitchen.

This mental shift doesn't come naturally to everyone trained in a professional kitchen. Restaurant culture rewards speed, precision, and hierarchy. Community food leads describe how important it is to unlearn that model, moving toward something more collaborative, more flexible, and, as many of them put it, more freeing. A different kind of creative challenge takes its place. Professional cooks bring skills that highlight seasonality and improve efficiency without sacrificing impact or creating waste.

Critically, many people who come through a community kitchen are already skilled cooks. They have fed families, managed budgets, and cooked across traditions. The food lead's role is to provide infrastructure, capacity, and a positive, equitable tone that honours what community members bring.

There is an enormous opportunity to learn from one another: about different cuisines, different ingredients, and different ways of making something from very little.



A food lead who does this well:

☐ **Brings volunteers into the work, not just the room.**

Asking a volunteer to taste a dish and decide whether it needs more seasoning, then genuinely acting on what they say, is the difference between a teaching kitchen and a demonstration kitchen. Incorporate volunteer recipes. Give people real ownership over tasks.

☐ **Folds things in quietly.**

Working unfamiliar or more nutritious ingredients into dishes people already love lets people discover that they enjoy something before they've decided, based on the name alone, that they don't.

☐ **Sets the tone.**

A calm kitchen lead produces a calm room. The food lead's behaviour on a demanding day sets the standard for everyone working alongside them.

☐ **Stays flexible.**

Donations arrive unpredictably and growing seasons are short. A menu with room for substitution built in serves this kind of food work far better than one locked in weeks ahead.

☐ **Feeds the volunteers well.**

Sitting down together, at the same table, eating the same food, is the whole philosophy made visible.

☐ **Keeps a record.**

Logging ingredients, quantities, sources, and costs after each meal is unglamorous and essential. It gives future teams a real picture of what the meal actually costs to run, what worked, and what to adjust. This is part of the food lead's role.

"The food lead's authority is measured by the room they help build, not the plate they personally produced."



The Menu

Free the Plants

For practical dish ideas and substitution notes, see Appendix D: Menu Ideas & Substitutions.

Canada's Food Guide has clearly shifted its guidance: more plants, more whole grains, less meat at the centre of the plate. Intensive livestock production is among the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions globally. This is not a fringe position but mainstream nutritional science catching up to what ecological reality has been showing for decades.

A community meal doesn't need to announce a plant-based menu or lecture anyone to move in this direction. It can simply make vegetables, legumes, and whole grains the backbone of a dish, with meat as an accent rather than the centrepiece, and let the food speak for itself. A well-made pasta or root vegetable stew in January, built from what County farms produced in October, is warming, generous, and inexpensive to scale.

Traditional, familiar food is not a failure of inclusion. Comfort food is how many people in this community experience being cared for through food. These dishes belong at the table. The shift suggested here is one of proportion and emphasis, introduced slowly, through skilled cooking, without fanfare.

The same thinking extends to what's in the cup. Water, tea, coffee, and milk/plant milk are the right defaults. Sugary drinks are worth avoiding, and not just as a nutrition note: adults experiencing food insecurity are more than twice as likely to develop type 2 diabetes as those who are food secure. Dessert follows the same logic. Fruit is an excellent option if your team wants to offer something sweet. If baking is part of your kitchen culture, keep it rustic and low in sugar. Save the celebration baking for celebrations.



Who Is Actually in the Room?

The County is visibly white, settler, and of European descent, and a lot of our food culture can be fairly described as meat and potatoes.

But "meat and potatoes" can quietly become a ceiling rather than a baseline if it's never questioned. The County is more diverse than it first appears, and we know nationally that racialized communities experience food insecurity at higher rates than the population overall. If your menu has never once reflected anyone outside a usual default, it's worth asking honestly whether that's a response to your community as it actually is, or a habit no one has revisited.

The fix isn't an exotic menu. It's a gentle, ongoing curiosity about who is actually being served, who isn't, and what would make the meal feel like it was made with them in mind. Low-friction ways in: build dishes that flex naturally, a base easily made halal, vegetarian, or dairy-free without a separate menu. Wherever possible, find ways to source insight from community members about what they want to eat before you plan. Treat feedback about food preferences as data worth acting on.



Quick-Start Planning Checklist

Before you commit:

- Can you offer this regularly, even monthly, rather than as a one-off?
- If not, can you partner with another organization to create a shared rhythm?
- Who is this meal actually for, and who is it likely to actually reach?
- Is your space and timing accessible to the people who would benefit most?
- Have you found ways to ask community members what they want to eat?

Four weeks out:

- Confirm space, timing, and equipment needs
- Begin outreach with enough lead time that people can plan around it
- Identify volunteer roles and who will lead the kitchen
- Brief the kitchen lead on tone and culture, not just food safety

Two weeks out:

- Finalize the menu with room for seasonal or donated substitutions
- Confirm at least one dish that flexes for different dietary needs without singling anyone out
- Reach out to local farmers or market vendors if local sourcing is part of your plan

One week out:

- Reminder outreach
- Confirm any local food orders or farmer pickups
- Assign specific tasks to volunteers matched to ability

The week of:

- Shop for what local sourcing didn't cover
- Brief volunteers on their roles and what they will learn, not just what they will do
- Think through the room: seating, serving style, entry. What does dignity look like here?

At the meal:

- Are people being greeted by name, or warmly, on arrival?
- Is entry non-stigmatizing, with no visible sorting or means-testing at the door?
- Are volunteers sitting and eating with community members?
- Is at least one main dish flexible for different diets, served with equal weight?
- Is there a way for a guest to return without re-introducing themselves?

After:

- What worked? What's worth repeating? How much did it cost to provide this meal?
- Did anything on the menu surprise people, in either direction?
- Share feedback with all the volunteers who helped in the event, not just leads.
- Who wasn't there? Is there anything in the design of the meal that might explain that?
- How are the relationships with local suppliers? Worth building on?

Local Resources for Getting It Done and the Word Out!

Community kitchens are inspected by public health and feature a range of quality commercial equipment and cold storage that help groups scale food preparation.

These sites feature banquet hall facilities and accessible washrooms:

Prince Edward Community Centre

375 Picton Main Street

The Wellington and District Community Centre

111 Belleville Street

Contact: 613.476.2148 ext. 5003 or email bookings@pecounty.on.ca.

PEC regional public health:

Southeast Public Health, Picton Office

35 Bridge St., Picton, Ontario K0K 2T0

613-966-5500, ext. 217, 1-800-267-2803, Fax: 613-968-1461

Food Handlers Certificate

This certificate is a government approved credential proving knowledge of core public health laws, personal hygiene, time and temperature controls, preventing cross-contamination, and proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures.

Under section 32 of Ontario's Food Premises Regulation (O. Reg. 493/17), any location where meals are prepared, served, or sold for immediate consumption, including community meals, is legally classified as a food service premise. The regulation dictates that at least one certified food handler must be on-site during every hour the community meal prepares and operates.

Obtaining a Food Handlers Certificate can be achieved by completing a Ministry of Health-approved course online (based anywhere in Ontario) and some public health units offer them in-person. Online courses take roughly 7-10 hours and allow you to go at your own pace. The range of pricing runs approximately \$25-50 and certificates are valid for 5 years.

Approved Courses:

- In Good Hands, www.ingoodhands.ca
- Food Safety, www.foodsafetytraining.ca
- Probe It, www.probeit.ca

Appendix A:

The Defaults Behind the Guide

The following, shares the "why" behind three habits this guide treats as defaults throughout, for the organizer who wants the evidence.

On Seasonality

Cooking with what's in season is not just a flavour preference. Local produce harvested at peak ripeness genuinely tastes better, and that matters for whether people come back. Seasonal, local produce travels a shorter distance, supports County farm economies directly, and tends to be less expensive at peak supply than imported equivalents. For a community meal program working with a limited budget, building menus around what's currently abundant is both a cost strategy and food systems work made practical.

It is also the foundation for real relationships with local growers, built on mutual respect, consistent purchasing, and fair prices. When an organization shows up faithfully and pays what the food is worth, the conditions for partnership shift over time. That is what good food systems work looks like between communities and the farms that feed them. Not charity in either direction.

On Whole Foods

A whole-foods, minimally processed approach to community meals does double duty: it is generally more nutritious, and it tends to cost less per serving than relying on pre-packaged or highly processed alternatives, particularly at scale. It also gives a community food lead room to model the kind of from-scratch, ingredient-forward cooking that builds food confidence in the people working alongside them. A community meal built on whole foods is a primary, functional and critical food literacy program.

Appendix B:

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Food systems work invites us to ask not just how food is grown and shared, but by whom, and on whose terms. Indigenous Food Sovereignty is a framework that has been asking those questions far longer than most, and it's worth knowing something about it.

A note before going further: this is a starting point, not a summary. The framework has deep roots and a body of Indigenous-led scholarship and practice behind it that goes far beyond what these pages can hold. We encourage every reader to go further.

For time immemorial, Indigenous peoples stewarded food systems of extraordinary abundance, sustainability, and nourishment: diverse, ecologically grounded, and deeply relational. These were not primitive precursors to modern agriculture. They were sophisticated, place-based systems that fed communities well while maintaining the health of the land, water, and relationships that made them possible. Colonization ruptured those systems deliberately, through the dispossession of land, the suppression of traditional practices, and the imposition of policies designed to sever Indigenous peoples from their foodways. Understanding that rupture, not as history but as an ongoing condition with ongoing consequences, is where engagement with Indigenous Food Sovereignty begins.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) is related to, but distinct from, the general concept of food sovereignty. Where mainstream food sovereignty frameworks focus on the right of peoples to define their own food systems, IFS centres the inherent right of Indigenous peoples specifically to govern their food systems according to their own laws, values, and relationships to land. Relationships that predate colonial governance and were never legitimately surrendered.

Three practical wisdoms from IFS are worth carrying into any community food context:

Relationality

Food is not a commodity or a transaction. It is a relationship: to land, to water, to other species, to the people food is grown and shared with. Research with Indigenous communities in southern Ontario found that people could maintain connection to the Land through the act of sharing and receiving food, even without direct access to the Land itself. Sharing food is an act of relationship, not just generosity.

Responsibility

Tending a food system, growing, harvesting, preserving, sharing, is an act of responsibility to community and to the land. This responsibility is not optional, and it is not individual. It belongs to the community as a whole.

Reciprocity

What the land gives, the community gives back: through care, through restoring what has been taken, through passing knowledge forward. Seed saving, land stewardship, teaching younger generations to cook and grow are all acts of reciprocity.

Prince Edward County sits within a territory with a complex and inadequately documented treaty history. The Crawford Purchase of 1783, covering much of this area, is widely acknowledged as a deeply flawed document, negotiated hastily and never properly honoured. The County Foundation's land acknowledgment recognizes the traditional territory of Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples, with the Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte as current neighbours.

A meaningful next step for any group using this guide is not to add a land acknowledgment to a meal, but to ask: who is doing food sovereignty work locally and regionally, and is there a genuine relationship to build?

For further reading, look to Indigenous-led sources directly: the Indigenous Food Systems Network (indigenousfoodsystems.org) and the work of scholars including Dawn Morrison, Winona LaDuke and Jeff Baker.

Appendix C: Meal Log Template

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jABVJSROKR5gJBmvRt75zOJ8YiWc5hvz_rzEhZZDU5w/edit?usp=sharing

Food Lead:	Prep date:
#Volunteers	Serve date:
# hours prep time:	Location(s):

Menu description:	Ingredients donated:
-------------------	----------------------

Key Ingredients	Quantity	Cost	Local Y/N	Source
Total cost:				

Yield info:
Portions served:
Portions sent home:

Substitutions Offered IE: vegan, GF

Stories & Feedback

*Template inspired by Right To Food / The Stop Community Food Centre

Appendix D:

Menu Ideas & Substitutions

The possibilities for delicious, whole-food meals are endless. Deciding what to make together is part of the fun. It's a natural way for the team to connect, and everyone brings different ideas about what works. Food leads should weave in suggestions where they can and keep notes for next time. Volunteers notice when their input actually gets used.

Menus are best shaped by seasonality and PEC food availability where feasible. Flank mains with extra vegetable dishes or interesting salads that incorporate pantry staples such as seeds, grains, currants, dried cranberries and herbs, mixed with tasty dressings.

Let's quietly enlist more vegetables.

Meal	Mains	Vegetarian, Vegan and substitutes
Breakfast	Scrambled eggs, sausage, toast	Tofu scramble, or swap sausage for seasoned beans
	Pancakes with sides	Pancakes are vegetarian, and can be made 1:1 GF flour and DF using plant milk; offer bacon on the side or fruit salad
	Breakfast hash (potato, meat, mixed veg)	Potatoes, peppers, onions, corn, and herbs can make a good-for-all feature. Or offer a version of meat swapped mushrooms, or chickpeas
Lunch	Chili and cornbread	Use lentils/beans as the base instead of ground meat, using the same method and same pot
	Soup and sandwich	Offer a lively vegetable-based soup alongside any meat-inclusive one + garnishes; sandwich fillings can include hummus, cheese, fresh and pickled veggies, or egg salad
	Pasta with meat sauce	Swap ground meat for lentils, mushrooms, or a plant-based crumble in the same sauce
Dinner	Shepherd's pie	Replace ground meat with well-seasoned lentils or a mixed bean filling under the same mash topping
	Stir-fry with rice	Swap meat for tofu, tempeh, or extra vegetables, using the same sauce and same rice base
	Butter Chicken	Butter paneer, a plant-based take on butter chicken, made with paneer or extra-firm tofu in the same tomato-butter sauce, with rice, naan and vegetable side

Insights on Substitutions

Category	Examples	Vegetarian/Vegan-friendly substitutions
Protein base	Ground meat, chicken, beans, lentils, tofu, eggs	Beans, lentils and tofu can fully replace ground meat <u>in</u> chili, tacos, shepherd's pie, and pasta sauce, allowing for the same <u>cook</u> method with no separate menu needed. In baking, 1 tablespoon of ground flax plus 2.5 tablespoons of water can be used to substitute an egg
Grains/starches	Rice, pasta, potatoes, bread	Naturally vegetarian with no adjustment needed, simply avoid meat-based broths or fats used in cooking
Broths/stocks	Chicken, beef, vegetable	Vegetable stock or bouillon can sub 1:1 in soups, stews, and braises
Fats/cooking base	Butter, oil	Oil-based cooking keeps a dish vegetarian by default; consider oil as the default
Dairy	Cheese, milk, yogurt, sour cream	Usually fine as-is, but flag if guests may need dairy-free too. Plant milks and dairy products are an easy substitution. Nutritional yeast flakes bring a cheesy flavour when incorporated into dishes
Flavor builders	Bacon, sausage, gravy, meat drippings	These carry a lot of the meaty flavor. Smoked paprika, ground mushrooms, soy sauce, Dijon, nutritional yeast flakes, or a good spice blend can create depth without meat
Nuts/seeds	Almonds, peanuts, walnuts, cashews	Favour seeds, such as sunflower, pumpkin, or hemp hearts, over nuts where possible, since tree nut and peanut allergies are common and often undisclosed in an open community setting. Note: coconut is botanically a fruit, not a tree nut, and is typically safe for those with tree nut allergies, including coconut milk and coconut oil. Always confirm directly with anyone who discloses a specific allergy

Appendix E:

References and Further Reading

This guide drew directly on two community meal resources:

Right to Food's Kitchen Confidential and the Healthy Kids Thunder Bay Community Dinner Resource Guide.

And The County Foundation's Vital Signs Focus Report 2025 provided the local data that grounds this guide in County-specific conditions.

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PEC Food Collective is a collaboration of local food programs and community members, working together to end hunger in Prince Edward County. Founded before the pandemic, the Collective unites efforts across the County to ensure that every person in PEC has access to healthy, affordable food with dignity.

PEC Food Collective includes:



This report was researched and written by Bree Seeley, a Red Seal chef, former food entrepreneur, and Board Director at both the Prince Edward Learning Centre and County Food Hub. She is a Food Security postgraduate student at Toronto Metropolitan University with a focus on food systems thinking.

**Every meal is a
chance to feed
people well, and to
feed the system
that feeds them.**

