

# Farm to Table Resilience: The Case of Withrow Park Farmers' Market & the Virtual Farmers' Market

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## Background

- Current disruptions to Canada's food supply chains have revealed major issues associated with our food system.
- While different frameworks have emerged over the past years attempting to analyze food system susceptibility to shock and disruption, the concept of resilience is being used by scholars, policymakers and activists alike to discuss effects and responses to the pandemic.
- Moving beyond a characterization, resilience, as a framework of supply chain management and business risk management, describes all food system actors and their continuous efforts to respond to change and disruption.
- With local food systems often praised for their ability to withstand crises, whether that be economic recessions or environmental events, their relevance in the COVID-19 context is apparent.
- This presents an important opportunity for the local food movement to demonstrate how shorter supply chains and the focus on neighbourhood provisioning show strong responses to adversity.
- To understand how small-scale initiatives have adapted to the crisis, illustrating wider local food system resilience, the Virtual Farmers' Market and Withrow Park Farmers' Market will serve as case studies. Their unique challenges and responses to pandemic-driven adversity are analyzed through a food system resilience framework and discussed through scholarly and activist discourses surrounding local and sustainable food.
- Here, how these small-scale initiatives have adapted to crisis is an important contribution to the study of local food system resilience, and efforts to improve upon food systems post-pandemic and beyond.

## Methodology

- A comprehensive literature review of food system resilience, both in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beforehand, was conducted to identify a framework with which to analyze local food system resilience.
- Here, a resilience framework based on principles outlined by supply chain management and business risk management is used to examine displays of resilience, as well as how it interacts with different food system actors throughout the supply chain.
- Data about each case study was collected through a series of stakeholder interviews, social media mining (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), as well as news and media reporting. Data collection tools like Instagram scraper and NVivo NCapture were essential to this process.
- Supplementary information was made available through each case study's website and reports provided by individual stakeholders.
- Subsequent discussion of local food systems is shaped by recent scholarly literature, as well as interviews and discussions with food system scholars and community members.

In what ways is resilience illustrated through the case studies and their responses to COVID-19? What implications does this have for the role of local food system actors moving forward?



Figure 1: Principles of Food System Resilience as described by business risk management and food supply chain management strategies

## Discussion: The Changing Role of Local Food System Actors

- With calls to shorten supply chains and incentivize local food production, evidence of the promise and potential of farmers' markets in reaching these goals comes at a particularly relevant time.
- Scholarly discussion on the food movement that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions of both mainstream and alternative food systems will be well served by the analysis and discussion of local efforts to adapt and secure community food provisioning.
- With countless examples of shortages, disruptions and inefficiencies in mainstream, industrialized production, the case studies' abilities to address all principles of food system resilience is relevant. With many of these principles built into the mission statements and goals of the case studies, resilience appears inherent to the movement.
- With greater consumer awareness of lengthy food supply chains and their propensity to disruption, the current juncture presents an important opportunity to learn from local food systems and incentivize this form of production and distribution on a larger scale in Toronto, and more broadly.
- Benefits to environmental justice, social cohesion and food security must not be left unmentioned.

### WITHROW PARK FARMERS' MARKET

Implemented a pre-ordering system, Local Line, that ensures guaranteed income for vendors on market days, and guarantee product availability for consumers

### VIRTUAL FARMERS' MARKET

Significant investment into technology and workflows to manage 10-20% change in food availability each week, which is possible through the cooperative nature of the initiative

### WITHROW PARK FARMERS' MARKET

This market's mission of providing fresh, local food and its supporters' commitment to it, push volunteer involvement and ensure its smooth functioning, in moments of crisis and otherwise.

### VIRTUAL FARMERS' MARKET

Rooting this system in a cooperative framework strengthens its initiatives and captures all food system actors involved. The commitment to feeding the population and continuing with local food growth makes it a movement not easily disrupted by outside forces.

### WITHROW PARK FARMERS' MARKET

As physical farmers' markets began to reopen in Toronto in July, Withrow Market provided consumers with diverse ways to access their local products, offering online shopping, in-person pickup and in-person shopping.

### VIRTUAL FARMERS' MARKET

With the variety inherent to smallholder and regenerative farming practices, consumers are exposed to produce and products they may have never been exposed to, given little interest to mainstream retailers.

### WITHROW PARK FARMERS' MARKET

The challenges experienced by food system producers were publicized, converging with the mission to encourage and promote short food supply chains, bringing together producers and consumers committed to local food

### VIRTUAL FARMERS' MARKET

The very nature of this initiative requires consumers to have an understanding of the production process. With pre-ordering, consumers know that farmers are predicting what they are marketing, before they have even harvested.

### WITHROW PARK FARMERS' MARKET

The win-win mentality shown by volunteers, consumers, and producers alike is not unique to the pandemic context. It is embedded in Withrow Park's mission statement and vision for food provisioning and social cohesion.

### VIRTUAL FARMERS' MARKET

The very initiative was started to aid farmers that had lost significant income from restaurant and farmers' market closures. The founders continue to streamline their technologies and design to ensure that it can be replicated by other groups in the region and across Canada.

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