



## Waste Not, Want Not

by Catherine Schwartz Mendez and Kendal Donahue

Spring is finally here – albeit delayed and making for a slow start to the growing season. The future will hold many challenges for gardeners – from the backyard hobbyist to large scale production. The best research tells us that as the Earth’s average temperature increases there is an increase in extreme weather events such as floods, fire and droughts. Signs of climate change are all around us. Many communities in the region are experiencing more heavy rain events. It was only two years ago this month that Thunder Bay experienced a severe flood that caused millions in damages to private property and municipal water system facilities. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has predicted for some time that changing weather patterns will have a major impact on food production leading to lower crop yields, in some cases, and outright crop failure in others.

The bottom line? Climate change will undoubtedly result in higher food costs. Severe drought in California earlier this year has already led to price hikes where a lime that used to sell for 33 cents is now 79 cents. Grocers are responding by importing produce. This in itself is only a partial solution as climate change will impact more areas over time and fuel prices are likely to rise. Places like Thunder Bay are also left with fewer options since most of our food is trucked in from the south and west.

Developing resiliency is a key goal for individual health and community well-being. Years ago, city and rural residents alike used to be much more self-sufficient--growing and preserving their own food. Grandparents who grew up in the depression and wartime eras used to save everything. Nearly everything was repurposed or reused.

Resilient people make resilient communities. By ensuring basic needs are met, we can tackle the bigger issues and are better able to adapt to stress and adversity. Although it’s an old-fashioned concept, conserving is becoming urgent again. The more decisions we make in favour of conserving farmland for agriculture, sustaining soil, water and air quality, and treating food “waste” as a resource that keeps soil and our planet healthy, the more food secure and resilient our communities will be.

A sense of food security – where everyone has equal access to nutritious food – will emerge as we plan and implement ways to grow, process, store and distribute food under conditions of variable weather (too much or too little water or temperatures too high or too low, at the wrong times). It will take a while, but the time is now to revive the skills and knowledge that have kept us alive for generations and to find new innovations.

To quote Dr. Ralph Martin, Professor and the Loblaw Chair in Sustainable Food Production at the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph; “Much of human history, indeed the history of the Earth itself, has been a drama of survival, against high odds. In the last few decades, at least in Europe and North America, the game plan has shifted to productivity, creature comforts and, as conscience prods, sustainability. Perhaps our polite efforts to sustain will elude us until we realize again, that the drama of survival is still with us.” His approach to sustainable food production is to produce enough food to meet dietary needs today, while preserving productive capacity for future generations of people and other species. This is assuming healthy soil, clean air and water, and the renewable and regenerative energy needed to build resiliency in our farming and fishing communities.

Conservation, resiliency, security; these concepts underpin the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy that is being launched with terrific community energy and a sense of urgency as we look to a sustainable food system as one big response to changes in climate and the severe weather events that signal those changes.

Learn more about this topic and what you can do at Dr. Martin’s upcoming talk on Thursday, May 29 at 7:00 p.m. It will be held at Waverley Resource Library and hosted by Environment North and the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy with partners Earthcare Thunder Bay, Ecosuperior and the Bay Credit Union. For more information, visit [www.environmentnorth.ca](http://www.environmentnorth.ca). Catherine Schwartz Mendez is a Public Health Nutritionist and member of the Food Strategy Steering Committee and Kendal Donahue is a Food Strategy Coordinator.