

AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF

HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES & TAP WATER

IN MUNICIPAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES
& AFFILIATED PUBLIC SPACES

MARCH 2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was financially supported by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Health Promotion Division, Healthy Communities Partnership Grant.

We thank all of the local individuals and groups that have supported this project.

This report was prepared through a collaborative effort with the Consultant and Grey Bruce Health Unit.

GREY BRUCE HEALTH UNIT
GREY BRUCE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP

PROJECT TEAM

Kevin Ng	Health Promotion Consultant, Project Lead
Lynda Bumstead	Public Health Manager, Grey Bruce Health Unit
Kathryn Forsyth	Public Health Dietitian, Grey Bruce Health Unit
Laura Needham	Public Health Dietitian, Grey Bruce Health Unit



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Healthy eating is an important way to stay healthy and reduce the risk of developing chronic disease. Recreational facilities (RF) provide opportunities to be active and engaged in the community. RFs are an ideal setting for the pairing and promotion of physical activity and healthy eating.

This environmental scan provides a snapshot of the availability of healthy food choices in municipal recreational facilities and public spaces. Information was gathered through the circulation of a questionnaire to 17 municipalities in Grey and Bruce, key informant interviews, facility tours, electronic communication with the counties, informal discussions with First Nations communities and a phone interview with a food service distributor.

All respondents expressed their support for healthier food choices in RFs. They indicated that revenue concerns, perceived level of patron interest and proximity to fast food outlets were barriers to selling healthier food options.

Sixteen of seventeen respondents were not aware of the Bruce Grey Food Charter. The majority of respondents did not have a consistent definition for local or healthy food choices.

Municipal tap water usage was consistent throughout Grey Bruce. Some facilities received questions about the safety and quality of their municipal tap water. Appropriate use of water refilling stations was also an issue for some facilities.

This report outlines a Grey Bruce Action Plan with the goal that all recreational facilities serve healthy food and beverages. Areas identified for moving forward include: using a Food Charter lens when reviewing current service contracts; completing a patron survey; creating a healthy food concession and vending machine policy; developing a business plan; continuing communication between facility operators and municipalities and improving, promoting and maintaining tap water access.

The Grey Bruce Health Unit applauds the efforts already in place to make recreational facilities a more supportive food environment. From the results of this environmental scan, it is evident that more work can be done through collaboration, policy development, and consistent approaches to implementation. It is our hope that strong partnerships can be forged between operators, vendors, municipalities and Public Health in order to make this a reality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
METHODOLOGY	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
RESULTS	
VENDING MACHINES	9
FOOD CONCESSIONS	10
BRUCE GREY FOOD CHARTER	12
MUNICIPAL TAP WATER	13
DISCUSSION	14
GREY BRUCE ACTION PLAN	15
CONCLUSION	17
REFERENCES	18
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	19

INTRODUCTION

Unhealthy food environments which promote the consumption of energy-rich and nutrient poor foods contribute to childhood obesity (WHO, 2000). Nearly one-third of Ontario children are overweight or obese (Statistics Canada, 2011). One of the major goals from the Healthy Kids Panel report is to create healthy food environments and increase the availability of healthy food choices. (Healthy Kids Panel, 2013). The foods children eat provide the nutrients and energy integral for growing and learning. Recreational facilities are places where kids go to have fun and be active. Often, there are few healthy food options available (Thomas & Irwin, 2010). Recreational facilities are uniquely positioned to support health and well-being in their communities. It has been identified that recreational facilities are a key setting to enact policies and practices in support of healthy eating behaviours (Grey Bruce Health Unit, 2015).



METHODOLOGY

A letter was sent from the Medical Officer of Health to 17 municipalities and 2 counties to introduce the project plan. The letter explained the purpose of the project and the concept of the environmental scan.

An email was then sent to key municipal staff members to provide a brief introduction about the project, schedule a tour of the facilities and complete a survey.

Information was gathered through:

- 1) the circulation of a questionnaire
- 2) meetings and key informant interviews with RF operators (e.g. arena managers, recreation program supervisors, facility managers)
- 3) tours of the recreational facilities - vending machines, food concessions, kitchens, storage areas
- 4) a phone call with a food service distributor
- 5) informal discussions with First Nations communities
- 6) electronic communication with the Counties

The Grey Bruce questionnaire was created from available resources and templates. The questionnaire was designed to capture the contact information of municipal staff who work in recreation, the healthy food choices available, knowledge of the Bruce Grey Food Charter and

tap water access. All municipalities and both First Nations communities participated in this environmental scan. Twenty-two recreational facilities are represented in the results.

LIMITATIONS

The environmental scan is meant to provide an overview of what is being offered in most Grey Bruce recreational facilities as of March 2015. Due to time constraints, not all recreational sites were visited during this environmental scan. Due to a small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to other populations.



LITERATURE REVIEW

The food environment significantly influences the dietary choices we make (Healthy Kids Panel, 2013). In Gatineau, Quebec, city council voted to eliminate all unhealthy foods from hockey arena canteens (Payton, 2009). In Hamilton, a resolution was passed to increase healthy foods in recreational facilities (RF) from 25% to 50% of total products available. As well, the “Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice” campaign was launched, which looked at improving the marketing and accessibility of healthy foods and beverages in municipal facilities (City of Hamilton, 2007).

Irwin and Thomas (2010) conducted a needs assessment to determine patron satisfaction with RF food and their purchasing preferences. They found that 52.2% were satisfied with the food choices at RFs. However, 59.2% and 68.8% reported not purchasing any food or beverages, respectively, from the concessions or vending machines. Patrons who did not make any purchases were dissatisfied with the lack of healthy food choices, poor food quality and high cost (Irwin & Thomas, 2010). All operators were interested in having more healthy food options and improving their understanding of what the patrons want. Thomas and Irwin proposed a pilot RF healthy-food intervention which would use the findings from their study, and begin with an education and awareness campaign describing healthy foods in the RF environment.

Several Canadian provinces have taken action to encourage and support recreational facilities in increasing the availability of healthy food choices. In 2008, the Alberta government released the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (ANGCY), which were voluntary and meant to facilitate access to healthy food and beverage choices within schools, childcare, and recreational facilities. One year following the release of the ANGCY, one-half of recreational

facility managers were aware of the guidelines and 6% of these managers actually implemented it (Olstad et al., 2011; Olstad et al., 2012). As well, facility and food service managers perceive that it is unprofitable to sell healthier foods and it would jeopardize sponsorship agreements (Olstad et al., 2012; Olstad et al., 2013). The New Brunswick government started taking action on healthy food choices in 2005 when they introduced Policy 711 (Healthier Foods and Nutrition in Public Schools). Through a patron and operator survey, they identified the most desirable options, which were fruit smoothies, fruit with yogurt dip, milk, bagels, sandwiches/wraps, vegetable sticks & dip. Based on the data that was gathered, they went on to develop a resource kit for RFs to increase awareness, education and resources and encourage a greater availability of healthy food choices (HEPAC, 2010).

One of the goals of the Grey Bruce Healthy Kids & Youth position paper is to facilitate the promotion and availability of affordable healthy food and beverage choices (Grey Bruce Health Unit, 2015). One of the recommendations is the need to strengthen existing policies for public venues. This will involve collaboration across all sectors.

Research has shown when the price of healthier foods is reduced, purchase of healthier foods increase. As well, purchases of unhealthier foods decrease when their prices increase (Drewnoski & Darmon, 2004).

In Tiny Township, ON, council voted to become a Blue Community, which recognizes water as a human right, promotes publicly financed, owned and operated water and waste water services, and bans the sale of bottled water in public facilities. Today, there are at least 16 Blue Communities in Canada (Township of Tiny, 2013).

RESULTS

VENDING MACHINES

In municipal recreational facilities (RF), vending machines are usually found in high traffic areas such as the lobby. Almost every facility has at least one vending machine in operation. Beverage vending machines are the most common. Many facilities also have a snack vending machine.

As long as the products are from the contracted supplier, operators of the facilities are able to control what is sold in vending machines. Current agreements with the machine vendors do not allow operators to purchase healthier alternatives outside of the agreement. Contract terms ranged from 3 years to 10 years. It was noted from one facility that if they did not renew their contract, all of their coolers and clocks would be removed.



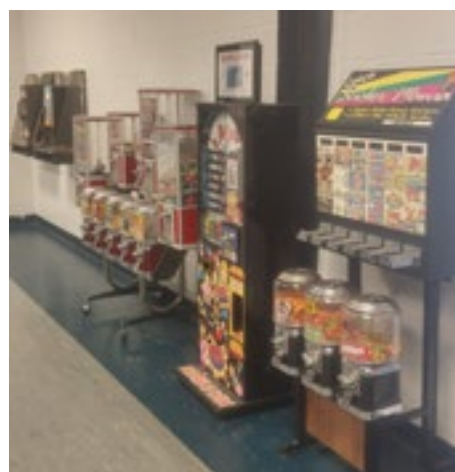
“
***If we don't re-
new our contract,
all the coolers
and clocks will be
taken away.***
- Quoted from key
informant interviews

Commonly Stocked Items

Snack Vending Machines	Beverage Vending Machines
Chocolate bars	Soft drinks
Chips	Sport drinks
Cookies	Fruit juices
Fruit snacks (e.g. Gummy and jelly candy)	Mineral water
	Bottled water

When asked about the availability of healthy beverage options, operators frequently noted sports drinks, fruit juices, bottled water and vitamin water. Snack vending machines did not have any healthy snack options.

Candy machines are in approximately half of the facilities. When asked about removing the machines, responses from operators varied from “not being an issue at all” to being a real issue because of their “revenue potential.”



FOOD CONCESSIONS

CURRENT SITUATION

The following chart contains items found frequently in recreational facilities (RF). Operators at busier arenas noted that slushies sold very well.

Items sold in concessions	Frequently found	High revenue Item
Chocolate bars	Yes	Yes
Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs - pop, fruit drinks, slushies, sports and energy drinks, hot chocolate)	Yes	Yes
Chips	Yes	Yes
Instant Noodle Cups	No	No
Microwavable Soup Cups	No	No
French Fries	Yes	Yes

Recreational facilities (RF) work with a range of suppliers. One facility had five separate suppliers for the following: vending machines, food concessions, candy machines, coffee and hot chocolate, and pizza.

PERCEIVED HEALTHY CHOICES

The majority of facilities indicated that they had at least one healthy choice or they had made attempts to offer more in the past. The options were:

Beverages	Food
Water	Egg muffin sandwiches,
Tea	toasted westerns
Gatorade G2	Nuts, trail mixes
Milk, chocolate milk	Sandwiches, soups
Fruit juice	Fresh fruits and vegetables
	Popcorn
	Chili, soups

Unfortunately, many facilities were not able to continue to offer all of the healthier options because of revenue concerns and/or because of the human resources that would be required. A group of parents wanted to sell an individual apple sauce serving but unfortunately, manufacturer restrictions did not allow for this.

LEVEL OF INTEREST

Many operators believed that patrons would not be interested in seeing more healthier food and beverage options in RFs. Going to an arena is seen as a “treat.” One operator questioned why there was even a need to change the menu offerings since it has been the same for many years. However, another operator believed that patrons are “sick of seeing french fries.” From the interviews, it is evident that every operator supports the idea of healthy food choices, but they identify barriers to actually offering them.

REVENUE

In many RFs, concession revenue is used to support children’s programs. Operators have concerns about running a profitable food concession with healthy food and beverage options. “It’s make money or break-even[...] Concessions will be outsourced [...] It’s like running a business,” said one operator. This operator estimated a loss of up to \$5000 in one year for this facility. The operator also believes that smaller towns would not be in a position to offer healthy food options on a regular basis.

Overall, operators noted a trend toward a drop in sales. They suggested this may be due to: consumer and operator finances, fewer games being held, fewer people attending, increased wastage of perishable products and proximity to fast food outlets.

OPERATIONS

Concessions at the RFs are open at various times from two to four hours per day, one to five times per week. They are often staffed by volunteers who can only provide limited support. As a result, concessions that are open for short periods of time are not able to keep a large quantity of perishable items in stock.

FOOD POLICY

None of the operators have a food or vending machine policy for their recreational facilities. One operator noted that although they did not have a policy, they have made the decision not to sell energy drinks.

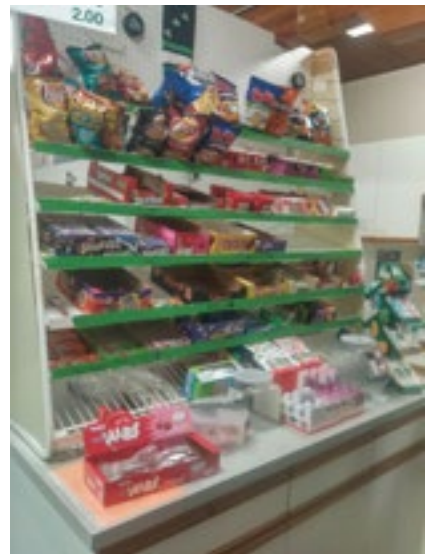
CONVENIENCE/FOOD SAFETY

Convenience is a key factor to sales. If a facility were to cook with fresh foods, the operator identified a need to train staff on safe food handling.



Top:
Sandwich station

Bottom:
Frozen muffins



In food concessions (left to right): Nacho machine, slushie machines, chocolate bars and chips

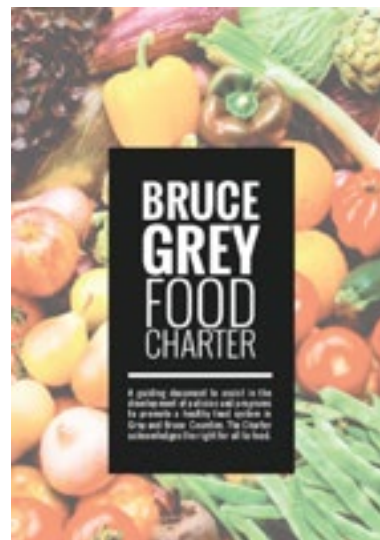
BRUCE GREY FOOD CHARTER

The Food Charter represents the collective vision of residents in Grey and Bruce Counties for a just and sustainable local food system. The Charter is a commitment to work together to build a vibrant, sustainable, food secure community.

One of the goals of the Food Charter is to increase the percentage of locally sourced food in Grey Bruce and make food more readily accessible for our residents including adequate transportation links, and neighbourhoods that encourage walkable and bikeable access to healthy food.

The vast majority of respondents were not aware of the Bruce Grey Food Charter. A small percentage of facilities sourced some of their food locally. These facilities have identified local economic development as a priority and have connected with local producers. Other facilities have previously sourced fresh fruits and vegetables from local businesses but due to lack of revenue, discontinued this practice.

The results of this scan reveal there is a need for increased awareness of the Food Charter and its goals. Operators acknowledged that having improved connections to local agri-food businesses could increase the number of healthy food options available.



<http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/Eating%20Well/Food-Charter.pdf>





MUNICIPAL TAP WATER

Overall, municipal tap water usage is consistent throughout Grey and Bruce. The water sources are usually located in high traffic areas such as the lobby, near the food concessions or near the washrooms.

It was suggested that having an incentive program for water refilling stations would encourage facilities to install them. However, the following issues of inappropriate use of existing water refilling stations have been identified: children playing with sensors and wasting water, patrons washing hands and hair, and disposal of fluids other than water.

The majority of facilities had at least one drinking fountain available. Tap water is available upon request. All facilities sell bottled water.

Many cities in Canada have already moved towards prohibiting the distribution and sale of bottled water in municipal recreational facilities and public spaces to support waste diversion goals and reducing litter. This includes Toronto, Hamilton, Tiny Township and Brandon, MB. Although plastic bottles are recyclable, it takes a significant amount of energy to manufacture, transport and recycle.

Grey Bruce residents have prioritized water use education by hosting the annual Water Festival in Chesley. Through this event all Grade 4 children in Grey Bruce learn about the importance of water sources, conservation efforts and the importance of water in everyday life (www.waterfestival.ca).

DISCUSSION

Municipal recreational facilities and affiliated outdoor spaces are places where everyone can be active and engaged in their community. These facilities serve as the hub of a community. Families may be spending lengthy periods of time in these environments. As such, these venues are positioned to enhance the health of children and families through access to healthy food choices.

The Healthy Kids & Youth report (Grey Bruce Health Unit, 2015) recommends that “municipalities create accessible and inclusive recreational opportunities, active transportation routes and accessible, affordable, local food”. This statement supports the Ontario Healthy Kids Strategy (Healthy Kids Panel, 2013) which recommends changing the food environment to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

It is important for recreational facility operators and municipalities to make the health of kids and youth a priority. An action plan is required in order to increase access to healthier food and beverage choices in facilities in Grey Bruce.

“Why should we change something that has been served for many years?”

- Quoted from key informant interviews

“Healthy options need to be available and you cannot be close-minded...”

- Quoted from key informant interviews

GREY BRUCE ACTION PLAN

1 Review the Bruce Grey Food Charter

- Utilize the Charter to guide plans when reviewing or developing programs or policies.
- Discover local food connections
 - » greycountychefforum.ca
 - » foodlinkgreybruce.com

2 Complete a patron survey.

- This action will help to identify what your customers want.
- Use the results of the environmental scan and patron survey to guide the development of your policy.
- Assess food choices in the concessions and vending machines every 6 to 12 months.
 - » stayactiveeathealthy.ca



Step-by-step approach to offering healthy choices in your facility or community

3 Develop a vending machine and food concession policy with guidelines for healthy choices

- Policy changes can have a strong positive impact on all community members. For a relatively low cost, community leaders can reshape the environment in a sustainable manner.
- Start working towards a policy if your facility does not have one.
- Guidelines will help to define what is a healthy choice and what is not.
- Contact Public Health for assistance with healthy food policy templates.
- Review policy guidelines every 12 months and revise as necessary.

4 Review existing vending machine and food service contracts.

- Review your existing contracts using a Food Charter lens.
- Inform your vendor of any new policies or guidelines.
- Discuss a timeline for implementation.
- Base any new contracts on the Food Charter and your facility's policy and guidelines.

5 Collaborate with fellow operators, the municipality, and the county to support healthy food and beverage choices.

- Identify champions.
- Share knowledge.
- Celebrate successes.

6 Develop a business plan for food concessions and vending machines.

- Approach your CAO (Chief Administrative Officer) and your EDO (Economic Development Officer) for assistance to create a plan that connects with local agri-food businesses.
- Recognize that profit margins are slim for any small food business
- Find your niche, be creative and set yourself apart from the fast food outlets.

7 Improve, promote and maintain tap water access.

- Establish a comprehensive public awareness campaign to promote the use of tap water and reduce the use of bottled water.
- Place new refilling stations in high traffic areas and ***consider signage about proper use.***



***The long-term goal of the Grey Bruce Action Plan:
All facilities serve healthy food and beverages.***

CONCLUSION

This environmental scan provides an overview of the availability of healthy food choices currently offered in municipal recreational facilities and spaces in Grey Bruce.

Some municipalities have recognized the importance of healthy choices in their facilities. They have increased the availability of healthier food and beverage options. However, the choices remain limited. Identified barriers include: a drop in revenue, level of interest, proximity to fast food outlets, and the challenge of dealing with multiple suppliers and operators.

The literature shows the need for policy development surrounding this issue. By putting health in all policies, we can make a difference for our children and youth.

Municipalities can utilize the Grey Bruce Action Plan to address barriers, develop consistent policies, create business plans and collaborate on projects. The Grey Bruce Health Unit is pleased to share these results and provide ongoing support for local initiatives. We believe there is a strong future for healthy food and beverage choices in recreational facilities in Grey Bruce.

REFERENCES

- City of Hamilton. (2007). Healthy nutritional environments in city recreational facilities. Retrieved from <http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/CorporateServices/Clerks/AgendaMinutes/CommunityServices/2006/June13CommunityServicesCommitteeAgenda.htm>
- Drenowski, A., Darmon N. (2005). The Economics of Obesity: Dietary Energy Density and Energy Cost. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 82, 265S-273S.
- Grey Bruce Health Unit (GBHU). (2015). *Healthy Kids & Youth: It's Time for Collaborative Action*. Owen Sound: Grey Bruce Health Unit.
- Healthy Kids Panel. (2013). No time to wait: The healthy kids strategy. Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy_kids/healthy_kids.pdf
- Healthy Eating Physical Activity Coalition of New Brunswick (HEPAC). (2010). *Healthy Eating Resource Kit for Community Recreational Facilities* Retrieved from http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.201028.Healthy_Eating_Resource_Kit_for_Community_Recreational_Facilities.html
- Irwin, J., & Thomas, H. (2010). Food Choices in Recreation Facilities: Operators' and Patrons' Perspectives. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 71(4).
- Naylor, P.J., Vander Wekken, S., Trill, D., & Kirbyson, A. (2010). Facilitating healthier food environments in public recreation facilities: Results of a pilot project in British Columbia, Canada. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration*, 28(4), 37-58.
- Olstad, D.L., Downs, S.M., Raine, K.D., Berry, T.R., & McCargar, L.J. (2011). Improving children's nutrition environments: A survey of adoption and implementation of nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 423-425.
- Olstad, D.L., Raine, K.D., & McCargar, L.J. (2012). Adopting and implementing nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities: Public and private sector roles. *BMC Public Health*, 12, 376.
- Olstad, D.L., Raine, K.D., & McCargar, L.J. (2013). Adopting and implementing nutrition guidelines in recreational facilities: tensions between public health and corporate profitability. *BMC Public Health*, 16(5), 815-23.
- Payton L. Gatineau deep-sixing the deep fry at hockey arenas. *Ottawa Citizen*. 2009 Feb 3.
- Statistics Canada. (2011). 2011 Canadian Community Health Survey. Retrieved from <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=50653&Instald=114112&SDDS=3226>
- Township of Tiny. (2013). *Environment*. Retrieved from <http://www.tiny.ca/living/environment>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2000). *Obesity: Preventing and managing the global epidemic*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Alberta

<http://www.healthyalberta.com/NutritionGuidelines-Sept2012.pdf>

Blue Community

<http://canadians.org/sites/default/files/publications/bcpguide-draft-web.pdf>

Food Link Grey Bruce

<http://www.foodlinkgreybruce.com/>

Grey County Chef's Forum

<http://greycountychefsforum.ca>

Grey Bruce Children's Water Festival

<http://waterfestival.ca>

New Brunswick

<http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/hic-csi/pdf/Wellness-MieuxEtre/HealthyFoods.pdf>

Region of Waterloo - Public Health: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/en/healthylivinghealthprotection/schoolresources.asp>

Stay Active Stay Healthy - Steps to Creating Healthy Choices

<http://stayactiveeathealthy.ca/>

Grey Bruce Health Unit

101 17th Street East
Owen Sound, ON, N4K 0A5
(519) 376-9420