

Food for thought



A farmer from Warner Farms in Beamsville, Ont., and pickers harvest pears.

Tyler Anderson, National Post Files

Dana Lacey, *Financial Post* · Saturday, Jul. 10, 2010

Do you ever think about where your food comes from? Do you struggle to make healthy food choices? What's the future of food in Canada?

A philanthropic group has spent eight years addressing these questions and now want government and local businesses to step up to ensure farmers earn a living and Canadians stay healthy and well-fed.

A series of five reports commissioned by the Metcalf Foundation and written by an assortment of NGOs, academics and practitioners from a range of sectors, highlight the importance of understanding Canada's food system.

"Food -- how and where we grow, process, distribute, sell and eat it -- is a fundamental human concern and central to the health of our communities, economy, environment, and bodies. Food is elemental, yet the system we have built around it is complex, rigid and opaque," says Lauren Baker, director of Sustain Ontario, in the report *Menu 2020: 10 good food ideas for Ontario*.

Canada's food system, the report argues, is unco-ordinated and lacks oversight, and Canadians are paying the price. But a variety of cultural, environmental, economic and social problems can be addressed through food.

The 10 good food ideas presented in the *Menu 2020* report include: support for producers of locally consumed fruit, vegetables and meats, including urban agriculture; support for rural entrepreneurship; making room for new farmers and alternative markets; implementing a food program in the school curriculum; support for community food centres; linking good food with good health; and planning for the future of farming and food.

"Public interest, civil society engagement, academic focus and government awareness has never been higher on this issue," says Sandy Houston, a former corporate lawyer and now president of the Metcalf Foundation. "We want to

stimulate multi-sectoral cooperation in advancing credible, grounded solutions that can be brought into action."

The Metcalf Foundation launched in 1960 with a \$10-million endowment from George Cedric Metcalf, who built his career in the grocery business with George Weston Ltd. It has spent almost a decade supporting food-and agriculture-related initiatives, from agricultural land trusts to new farm incubators to low-income neighbourhood farmers' markets. It boasts more than \$100-million in assets.

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