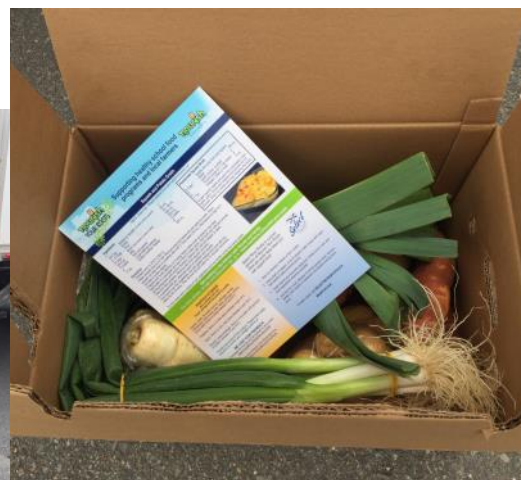


2019 REPORT



Prepared by Nourish Nova Scotia and Caroline Whitby, NYR Coordinator

OVERVIEW

Nourish Your Roots (NYR) is a farm-to-school fundraising program co-created by Nourish Nova Scotia alongside community collaborators. The purpose of NYR is to connect farms with schools and non-profit childcares to sell boxes of fresh produce as a fundraiser for the schools' own healthy eating programs. NYR was intentionally designed to help sustain school-wide healthy food programs and initiatives while supporting the local farm and agricultural economy in Nova Scotia. It also supports the fundraising guidelines and directives in the *Food and Nutrition Policy for NS Public Schools* and the *Food and Nutrition Standards for Regulated Childcare Centres*.

Sales for the 2019 campaign began the second week of September with final deliveries taking place the week after Remembrance Day. Twenty-six farm partners provided produce for 126 participating sites across the province. A total of 13,382 boxes were sold generating \$401,460 in revenue; \$248,418 for Nova Scotia farmers and \$112,897 for schools. Nourish received \$40,146 towards the program's administration.

It was another strong year for NYR, and although the total number of boxes decreased slightly, the program remains successful. Competition in the space has seen the growth of other farm-to-school fundraisers and demonstrated the interest Nourish Your Roots has created in building connections between local farms and schools to positively influence food environments.

This report was informed by Nourish Your Roots Coordinator, Caroline Whitby and Nourish Executive Director, Margo Riebe-Butt, using data collected from online surveys and interviews with participants. Percentages referenced in this report are based on survey responses. The first section of the report provides highlights and reflections from the 2019 campaign. The second section provides a behind-the-scenes perspective on the planning and organization involved in operating this program.



"The best part about participating in NYR is knowing how much it helps the schools provide healthy food for the students." - Farmer

FEEDBACK FROM FARMERS

Farmers reasons for taking part in NYR varied. Overall supporting a healthy school fundraising opportunity was deemed the most important. Increasing revenue, awareness and making connections with local school communities were also deemed important.

Several farmers indicated capacity to do more boxes since they have done it for several years now and the organizational effort is much less than it once was. Many are easily able to accommodate larger numbers if needed.

Most farmers agreed that NYR positively impacted their bottom line. With regard to price most felt they received fair value. One farmer commented that they based the content of their boxes on the wholesale price of the produce plus labour for packing with no premium built in. Others noted with rising costs of production a price increase is needed especially for those accustomed to selling much of their product retail. Having heard similar comments in the last couple of years the Nourish Your Roots Advisory have recommended a price increase for 2020, which will ideally be held for the next 5 years, unless an extreme event warrants a review sooner.



"I don't want to waste food. It is a good reason to go through my cookbook collection to find inspiration."
- Customer

FARM PARTNERS

Without the hard work and commitment of our farm partners Nourish Your Roots would not be possible. This year 26 farmers and farm markets were involved growing, packing and distributing produce. The map below shows where they are located across the province.

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1 | Noggin's Corner Farm Market - Greenwich, NS | 15 | Riverview Farm - Tusket, NS |
| 2 | TapRoot Farms - Port Williams, NS | 16 | Wile's Lake Farm Market - Bridgewater, NS |
| 3 | Longspell Point Farm - Kingsport, NS | 17 | Indian Garden Farms - Hebbville, NS |
| 4 | Lindsay Rand - Delhaven, NS | 18 | Hank's Farm Market - Millville, NS |
| 5 | Basinview Farm - Canning, NS | 19 | Eyking Farms - Millville, NS |
| 6 | Vermeulen Farms - Canning, NS | 20 | Forever Green Farm and Gardens - Tracadie, NS |
| 7 | Blomidon Produce - Sheffield Mills, NS | 21 | Hilltop Homestead - Westville, NS |
| 8 | Elmridge Farm - Centreville, NS | 22 | Vistabella Farm - Malagash, NS |
| 9 | Starr Best - Woodville, NS | 23 | Alder Meadow Farms - Lake Killarney, NS |
| 10 | Sawler Gardens - Berwick, NS | | |
| 11 | Spurr Brothers - Kingston, NS | | |
| 12 | Goucher's Farm Market - Wilmot, NS | | |
| 13 | Fairn Orchards - Moschelle, NS | | |
| 14 | Ring's Country Market - Barton, NS | | |



- | | |
|----|--|
| 24 | Dueck Family Farm - Lake Killarney, NS |
| 25 | Timothy Loewen - Lake Killarney, NS |
| 26 | Millen Farms - Great Village, NS |

"We support this program because it has a positive effect on our local communities in many ways."

- Farmer

NYR BOX CONTENTS



The NYR box consists primarily of root vegetables. Root vegetables transport well and are available in large enough volume in Nova Scotia to fill the orders. The NYR boxes also help to educate Nova Scotians about what is grown in the province. Nourish Your Roots provides farmers with an opportunity to introduce customers to new vegetables and fruit that they may not have been exposed to before or were unaware grew in Nova Scotia such as celeriac. Additionally NYR introduced consumers to a different variety of a common vegetable; for example, one farmer included Nappa cabbage this year.

The variety of items provided during this year's campaign included: apples (various), beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage (various), carrots, celeriac, cilantro, cranberries, eggplants, garlic, kale, leeks, onions, parsnips, pears, pie pumpkins, potatoes, sweet peppers, sweet potatoes, scallions, squash (various), tomatoes and turnips (rutabaga).

DELIVERY MODELS

Shipping ready packed boxes continues to be the most popular method for farmers involved in the program. Alternate models include; packing at the school, the farm, or farm pickup. These alternate models demonstrate the flexibility within the NYR program to respond to the capacity and interests of communities across the province.

Packing took place at four schools this year with the farmers transporting the produce in bulk to the schools for the students to pack. This activity provided increased opportunities for students to engage with the farmer. This is also true for the school whose customers had the opportunity to visit and pack their own boxes at the farm and/or pick them up from a farm market.



FEEDBACK FROM EDUCATION PARTNERS

Schools took part from all Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) and Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial and included for the first-time, two schools from Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. One of which launched their campaign with cultural teaching and a shared harvest meal for students and community members. The Acadian First Nations community in Yarmouth also hosted an event for students from Plymouth school to help launch their NYR campaign.

Schools indicated that NYR was easy to implement with 93% considering it a successful fundraiser. As one survey respondent noted *“Everything is fantastic. The resources we receive are great. We receive notice well in advance! The boxes have great produce!”*

The week before Thanksgiving is the preferred delivery week. Many felt that when they receive their deliveries that week, they have better sales. A number of schools noted that although their fundraiser didn't necessarily generate a large profit that was okay because it was supporting local farmers, healthy eating and through donation of boxes allowed them to support others in their community. Over 360 boxes were donated this year.



Funds raised through this program intentionally support school-wide healthy food programs. Sixty-five percent of the schools indicated that all or some of the funds raised would be reinvested in their breakfast program. Others noted that funds would be used to support healthy snack programs, farm to school programs and school food gardens.

Over 70% feel that this fundraiser positively impacts food culture in their school as noted by one school NYR; *“Changes the mentality of what a fundraiser can be and reinforces lessons learned at lunch and in the garden.”* Other schools talk about how it *“Piggybacks on our new healthy food cafeteria program and Farm to School program; kids are bringing home ideas about healthy eating and locally sourcing their foods.”*

“I think it encourages our kids and their families to be excited about fresh produce, and perhaps try something new that they might not otherwise purchase. It also exposes our kids to what we are able to grow in our own communities.” - Principal

PROMOTING FOOD LITERACY

Food literacy is the knowledge and understanding of how food choices impact our health, the environment, the community and our nation, and it is key to the work of Nourish. While Nourish Your Roots is primarily a school fundraiser it provides a great link to this work. One junior high school teacher noted, *“In preparation for gathering sales, classroom conversations had students thinking/discussing possible root vegetables and the variety in the box. We reached out to a neighboring school to see what they received and this got the students thinking about the farm location and producers in Nova Scotia. We also discussed supermarket pricing and students gained an appreciation for the value of the NYR box.”*

NYR Food Literacy Impacts at a Glance

- ⇒ 25% bought a NYR box for the first time
- ⇒ 59% tried cooking with a new vegetable/fruit/herb
- ⇒ 51% are more aware of where to buy local
- ⇒ 72% planned to purchase directly from a farmer or farm market in the future
- ⇒ 57% have an increased understanding of the importance of supporting healthy fundraisers
- ⇒ 49% were now aware of Select NS but were not prior to buying a box



FRESHFest 2019



Cooking with Chef Ben



Cooking for a Cause



“There was a great deal of conversation generated about healthy eating. Parents and our School Advisory Council were very pleased with the fundraiser. There will be benefits for all students as this funding will go directly toward our Breakfast Program.” - Principal

IMPACT

Nourish Your Roots demonstrates that fundraising with healthy food can be successful. Ninety-three percent considered their 2019 campaign worthwhile and would participate again. Meanwhile other schools excited by the possibilities have been reaching out to farmers and farm markets on their own. For example, a number of schools within the Halifax Regional Centre for Education have established ongoing relationships with their own farm partners and are now using them for a fundraising program. These relationships have since provided opportunities to get fresh vegetables and fruit into schools throughout the year as part of school breakfast, snack and lunch programs. Consistent partnership and exposure to healthy, local food positively influences the food culture and the everyday lived experience for students when they are at school. NourishNS applauds this development but acknowledges this has impacted the NYR program in 3 important ways:

- Decreases NYR sales
- Causes confusion for customers related to the NYR brand
- School NYR profits are earmarked to sustain school food programs, with other farm-to-school fundraising programs they may not be



“This is a wonderful fundraiser and the community really enjoyed that this was food being supplied by local farmers. This gave more incentive for people to buy a box of food as they knew they were not only supporting our school, but also supporting local farmers and not a big retail outlet.” - Customer

FEEDBACK FROM CONSUMERS

Ninety-seven percent of customers said they were likely to purchase a box again if offered. For 65% the most important reason to buy a box was to support the school, but for many receiving farm fresh produce, supporting local farms and a healthy school fundraiser were also important. One person noted *“It is a product that people need and will purchase at a box store so why not support local farming and support our kids at the same time.”* For some it encouraged them to try a new recipe. People were happy to receive a high-quality product, *“The variety and quality of the vegetables was impressive!”* and continuing to maintain that high standard will be important moving forward.



“I love this fundraiser! I always look forward to making a nice soup and having healthy veggies with supper.” - Customer

BEHIND THE SCENES OF NOURISH YOUR ROOTS

The fall campaign is the culmination of a year-long process that is coordinated by the NYR coordinator and supported by the Nourish Your Roots Advisory and staff at Nourish. The work is guided by values and principles that focus on building relationships with farmers and school communities across the province, respecting diversity, while at the same time ensuring a quality program that is delivered with integrity. To consistently offer a program of this kind requires particular attention to detail, strong communication, organizational and time management skills, as such the NYR Coordinator is vital to its success.

Planning

Planning for the year ahead is guided by three things:

- Learnings from the past year, gathered through surveys and conversations with farmers, stakeholders and schools
- Commitment from the farmers
- Expression of interest by schools and non-profit child care centres to participate

“We are so fortunate to be able to participate in this fundraiser every year. Parent/families look forward to it and find that the items are of great value for the price paid for the box. The items in the box are very fresh and families love that the fundraiser supports local farmers and helps their school too”. - Principal

Planning and Promotion

During the spring and summer the focus is on planning and promotion. This includes development and delivery of materials (envelopes, boxes and inserts), a communications plan, online resources, and engaging sponsors and partners.

For example, this year a pilot was developed to engage local organisations and extend the reach of NYR beyond the school community to help increase sales. School communities are very diverse and it can be challenging for some to raise funds based on their demographics. Through a connection with the Masons, the Kentville Lodge partnered with a school. This resulted in a 50% increase in sales for the school, who use this program to partially fund their breakfast program. This model will now be looked at more closely to see what opportunities exist in order to develop it further in other jurisdictions.



“I liked not knowing what I ordered; part of the fun of opening the box.” - Customer

BEHIND THE SCENES OF NOURISH YOUR ROOTS

Delivery

Once school starts in September all the logistical details must be complete. Schools are paired with the appropriate farm, delivery routes and schedules have been created, and as everything ramps up, schools are supported through their selling period. Orders are provided to farmers; invoices issued and packing/deliveries occur on a rolling basis across the entire province. The NYR Coordinator also responds to any issues that may arise for example this year changes had to be made to scheduling and routes due to Hurricane Dorian.

Quality concerns are also addressed by the coordinator as success of the program depends on good customer service. The coupon system developed last year worked well this year and specific produce quality issues raised dropped from 35 to 11. Taking a proactive approach through the use of social media to share the challenges faced due to the weather this season may have helped, however continued vigilance is necessary moving forward to ensure an overall high standard is maintained.

Website and social media metrics

To promote the NYR campaign, and assist consumers with how to cook with produce in the NYR box, a communications plan including social media is created. Through social media Nourish encourages engagement with consumers to promote NYR, promoting resources on the Nourish website, and actively sharing family and school posts.



8,822 Nourish Your Roots web-page views during the campaign. The most popular page being the list of schools selling (2,068 views), produce storage information (788) and the resources for schools (541)



1,391 Recipe views during the campaign



Active engagement on social media, i.e., 4758 Facebook users reached with just one NYR post having 34 shares

Other ways that social media was used to support families in exploring their Nourish Your Roots produce, included:

- A feature episode on Chef Ben Kelly's online cooking show. Chef Kelly and Nourish's Acacia demonstrated how the box produce could be used to prepare Moroccan Stew (a recipe featured on the Nourish website).
- Recipes using Nourish Your Roots produce are featured in the Cloud Cookbooks, a virtual cookbook portal through the Halifax Public Libraries.



"We are familiar with all vegetables and love love love to eat fresh nutritious food!!" - Customer

CONCLUSION

Nourish Your Roots is a dynamic program that has demonstrated its ability to evolve and change based on the needs of stakeholders. Looking ahead to 2020, a price adjustment is planned to ensure that participation continues to be a viable option for farm partners. Looking ahead to 2021, the NYR advisory is working to pilot a spring campaign will provide an opportunity to address the intense competition that occurs during the fall campaign and further highlight NS produce available at other times of the year.

Nourish receives core funding from the Province of NS to support school healthy eating programs. Nourish Your Roots is sustained through the generous support of Select NS along with individual and corporate donations to Nourish Nova Scotia. Through these gifts, donors are ensuring the program grows and thrives. They are also demonstrating support for the belief that we can positively influence our food culture and sustain rural food infrastructure in Nova Scotia as a means to motivate social and economic prosperity. If you include yourself in any of the groups named, THANK YOU for making Nourish Your Roots possible!

“Delicious bridge between school and community” - Customer



“It turned a small profit but more importantly it was a better alignment of the direction of our school toward modeling healthy, active lifestyle for our kids and families.” - Principal