



Evaluation Report:

The Pod

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GUELPH & WELLINGTON TASK FORCE FOR
ELIMINATION

Background

The POD Community Food Distribution Program is an initiative of The Seed¹ “aimed at increasing access to fresh, healthy food for low-income community members in Guelph.”² In May 2016, The POD began acquiring fresh produce from local distributors, retailers, and farmers through bulk purchasing, gleaning and donations. The produce is stored in a centralized storage facility, and then redistributed on a weekly basis to six community-based charitable food assistance programs.³

Description of the Evaluation

The evaluation of The POD was designed to obtain information from charitable food assistance programs about the quality and quantity of the produce they distribute to clients. This evaluation is part of broader efforts to assess the extent to which The POD is effective in improving access to fresh produce among those requiring emergency food provision in Guelph.

Key informant interviews were conducted in July and August 2016 with representatives from five charitable food assistance programs that are currently working with The POD.

The Research & Knowledge Mobilization (R&KMb) Committee of the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination provides ongoing support and acts as a resource to Poverty Task Force (PTF) Committees, including The Seed and The POD. In this role, members the R&KMb Committee conducted the key informant interviews, as well as reviewed and analyzed the results that are summarized in this report.

Results & Discussion

The research participants were asked a number of questions about the produce they distribute to their clients, including where they purchase it, how much they distribute, and how much they are spending. While all of the participants confirmed that their organizations or programs are currently receiving produce from The POD, only one participant indicated that The POD is their sole provider for produce.

¹ <http://theseedguelph.ca/>

² <http://theseedguelph.ca/index.php/thepod/>

³ <http://theseedguelph.ca/index.php/thepod/>

Others noted that they also purchase produce from wholesalers (40% of participants), grocery stores (40% of participants), and the farmers' market (20% of participants) (Figure 1). While the question focused on produce that is purchased, it is assumed that most, if not all, of the charitable food assistance programs also receive produce from donations.

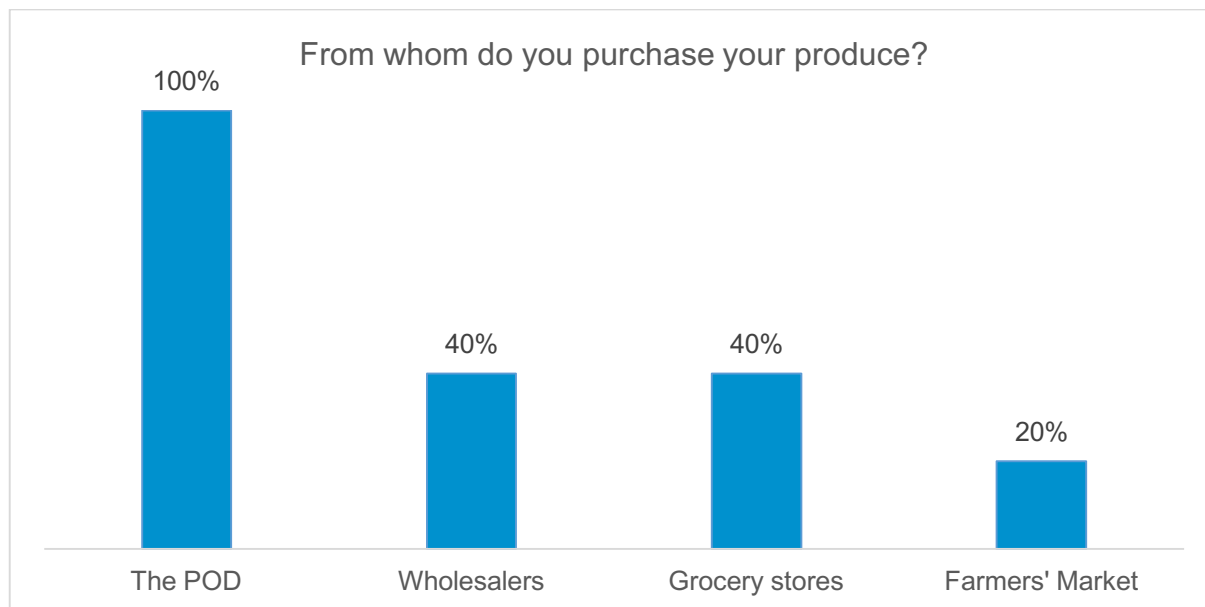


Figure 1: Where charitable food assistance programs are purchasing produce

In terms of the amount of produce, just over half (60%) reported that they have not seen a change in the amount of produce they distribute as a result of working with The Pod, while the rest (40%) said they are able to distribute more. Survey participants indicated that their charitable food assistance programs typically distribute anywhere from 400 lbs. to 2600 lbs. per month. Overall, the findings indicate that approximately 11,000 lbs. of fresh produce per month is being distributed by the five programs. However, only 40% indicated that amount of produce distributed from month to month is consistent, citing the budgets, number of clients, and seasonal change as reasons for variation.

The research participants were also asked about their program budgets for purchasing produce. Overall, it was estimated that just over \$70,000 was spent in one year on fresh produce among the five organizations and programs *before* they started receiving food from The Pod. When asked about the *current* budget for fresh produce, three participants noted that their program budgets have increased, while two participants said their program budgets have not changed. The overall increase was reported to be \$26,000, bringing the total amount budgeted for fresh produce for one year to \$96,000.

Participants were asked a number of questions about the produce their programs distribute that required them compare their experiences before working with The POD to their experiences of currently working with The POD. For example, participants reported that their programs distributed 2 to 9 different types of vegetables before working with The POD. Since working with The POD, the programs are typically able to distribute 6 to 9 different types of vegetables. Notably, the programs that were able to distribute the least number of different types of vegetables have experienced the most significant increase now that they are working with The POD (Table 1).

Table 1 Change in number of types of vegetables distributed

	Pre-POD (# of types of different vegetables)	Post-POD (# of types of different vegetables)	Difference (# of types of different vegetables)
Program 1	7	7	0
Program 2	2	6	+4
Program 3	5	7	+2
Program 4	9	9	0
Program 5	6	8	+2

The findings were similar for the number of different types of fruits distributed pre- and post-POD. Before working with The POD, research participants reported that their programs distributed 1-3 different types of fruit. This increased to 2-5 different types of fruits after working with The POD (Table 2).

Table 2 Change in number of types of fruits distributed

	Pre-POD (# of types of different fruits)	Post-POD (# of types of different fruits)	Difference (# of types of different fruits)
Program 1	3	3	0
Program 2	2	2	0
Program 3	1	3	+2
Program 4	3	3	0
Program 5	2	5	+3

Participants were asked to consider their programs ability to meet the demands of their clients for fruits and vegetables pre- and post-POD. Two participants (40%) said they were never able to meet their clients demands for fruits and vegetables pre-POD and have not experienced a change post-POD. Similarly, one participant reported that they could sometimes meet their clients demands pre-POD, but have not experienced a change post-POD. The remaining participants (40%), however, have observed an improvement in their programs ability to meet the demands of their clients for fresh fruits and vegetables. This group reported that they could rarely meet their clients demands for fruits and vegetables pre-POD, but can usually meet demands now that they are working with The POD (Table 3).

Table 3 Ability of programs to meet clients demand for vegetables and fruits

	Vegetables		Difference	Fruits		Difference
	Pre-POD	Post-POD		Pre-Pod	Post-Pod	
Program 1	Never	Never	None	Never	Never	None
Program 2	Rarely	Usually	Positive	Rarely	Usually	Positive
Program 3	Rarely	Usually	Positive	Rarely	Usually	Positive
Program 4	Never	Never	None	Never	Never	None
Program 5	Sometimes	Sometimes	None	Sometimes	Sometimes	None

In terms of the quality of produce they receive, all of the participants suggested that pre-POD, all produce was deemed to be good or very good quality. As a result of work with The POD, 40% of providers reported an improvement of “good” to “very good”.

Participants were asked a number of questions about challenges they face related to their programs ability to acquire, store, and distribute produce. In terms of storage, nearly all participants (80%) reported that they have sufficient storage space to keep produce fresh until distribution. Of those participants, most (75%) were at their maximum capacity, while the remaining 25% suggested they could store more produce. Only one participant reported that they do not have sufficient storage for produce.

Nearly all (80%) of participants suggested that their produce rarely or never goes bad before it can be distributed, while 20% said that this sometimes happens. Similarly, 80% of participants suggested that they rarely or never have produce left over (i.e. not taken by clients) and 20% said this sometimes happens. None of the participants indicated a change in these situations since working with The POD.

All of the research participants suggested that budget limitations are a barrier in acquiring more produce, while 80% said space limitations are also a challenge, and 20% mentioned staff and volunteer capacity.

Finally, when provided an open-ended opportunity to address challenges of receiving produce from The POD, 60% of participants referenced The POD's delivery schedule. One participant suggested that more frequent delivery options would be helpful, while the others noted that it was sometimes difficult to make the delivery times work with program hours.

Participants were also provided an open-ended opportunity to identify benefits of working with The POD. All of the participants noted the positive relationship they have developed with The POD's Coordinator, particularly in comparison to the working relationship they have with larger distributors. It was noted that The POD Coordinator is quick to respond to any issues with quality and has developed an ordering system that is convenient and easy to use. The participants expressed appreciation for the personal connection they have developed with The POD's Coordinator, suggesting that he always has the best interests of the programs in mind, and does his best to find the best quality and deals.