

# **Food Storage Needs Assessment**

Includes:  
**Final Report**

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## Introduction

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### **Purpose**

Since the Seasoned Spoon started in February of 2003, it has had a major food storage challenge. That is, it has had very limited and inadequate space to store food, and the other options of food preservation, such as canning or drying, for example, had not yet been fully examined and understood. Also, when a high amount of food is in season, throughout the summer months, the Seasoned Spoon is not in operation and it therefore has very limited access to it. This lack of storage and preservation methods has impeded the Seasoned Spoon from providing as much locally grown, organic and affordable food, as outlined in the Seasoned Spoon mandate, as possible. In locating areas for the Seasoned Spoon to store its food and in understanding and undertaking other food preservation methods, the Seasoned Spoon will further be able to contribute to the underlying goals of a sustainable food system, which include, promoting ecological sustainability, building strong local community and fostering personal well-being, which are outlined in the Seasoned Spoons' sourcing policy (Seasoned Spoon, 2006).

The Food Storage Needs Assessment (FSNA) project is the first project to tackle the Seasoned Spoon's struggle over food storage and preservation. What has been researched and examined for the FSNA project, and what is therefore included in this report, includes the seasonal availability of certain types of food, the Seasoned Spoon's strengths, weaknesses and knowledge of the food storage issue, the importance of food storage and preservation for the Seasoned Spoon and in a sustainable food system and how to preserve and store food for the fall and winter months. Subsequently provided are detailed steps that can be taken for future initiatives on food storage for the Seasoned Spoon as well as other recommendations based on issues raised that call for further discussion.

## **Importance of Food Storage and Preservation**

### **Sustainable Agriculture**

Food storage and preservation is an essential element in creating and maintaining a sustainable food system, which also makes it essential to the Seasoned Spoon. Brewster Kneen's three principles of a sustainable food system, which are keystones in the Seasoned Spoons' sourcing policy, include proximity, diversity and balance.

#### *Proximity*

As defined by Kneen, proximity in the context of agriculture is the "consumption of food as close to the point and condition of production as possible" (Kneen, 1995). When sufficient food storage exists and other methods of preserving food are exercised, the ability to source food locally is increased. This is especially applicable to the Seasoned Spoon because the Seasoned Spoon is not open during the summer months, a period when a great deal of food is in season. If the Seasoned Spoon had space designed for food storage, food that is in season during the summer months could be better stored away and made available for the fall and winter seasons. This coincides with food that is

in season in the fall, which could be made more available during the winter and spring seasons, which are the most difficult times to source food locally.

### *Diversity*

Diversity, in an agricultural context, is “ensuring the maximum variety of crops on the farm, skills in the community, and genetic material in the ecosystem” (Kneen, 1995). When suitable food storage space and preservation methods exist, the ability to source the most diverse amount of crops is strengthened. The Seasoned Spoon, for example, could source a higher amount of food and therefore a higher variety of food. Going hand in hand with proximity, more diverse foods from the summer months, when the Seasoned Spoon is not in operation, can be made available longer throughout the year. In providing more diverse food, the Seasoned Spoon would be further supporting and enhancing local farming practices that are based on diverse crop rotation, and therefore, a variety of skills.

### *Balance*

As also defined by Kneen, balance, in an agricultural context, is

achieved through organic agriculture and complex crop rotation, which ensures that farming can be pursued on a long term basis that works in tandem with natural systems. Socially, balance implies equity between those that grow food and those that consume it” (Kneen, 1995).

Balance simply entails that agricultural practices work within the cycles and balances of the natural environment, and that those who grow food get enough in return and that those who eat the food can get it at an affordable price. When adequate storage space and preserving methods are utilized, balance can be further reinforced and maintained. For the Seasoned Spoon, for example, complex crop rotation can be supported through sourcing a higher diversity of crops, as described in “diversity.” By storing and preserving food, the Seasoned Spoon will also be able to purchase food in bulk more often from local farms. This will make food cheaper to the Seasoned Spoon, and therefore its customers, and guarantee farmers a market for their crops.

In strengthening the ability of the Seasoned Spoon to store and preserve its food, the underlying goals of sustainable agriculture and the interconnected concepts of proximity, diversity and balance can be reinforced, and fundamental principles of the Seasoned Spoon’s mandate can be further maintained.

### **Education**

Methods of food storage and preservation are valuable resources for education. Within the Seasoned Spoon and Trent University, food storage is especially valuable for education. As part of the Seasoned Spoons’ mandate, the seasoned Spoon works to

“offer student learning opportunities through paid staff, volunteer work, and affiliated courses” (The Seasoned Spoon, 2003). By taking further initiatives to develop and maintain food storage and preservation methods, food storage and preservation can be included as key educational opportunities provided by the Seasoned Spoon. For example, if the Seasoned Spoon stored more of their own food and took advantage of other food preservation methods, the Seasoned Spoon could provide learning opportunities to the Trent University community on such topics as, how build a storage cellar, how to store different types of food and how to dry different types of food. These educational opportunities could be tied into the underlying goals of sustainable agriculture and a sustainable food system, which are highly tied into the Seasoned Spoons’ mandate.

### **Current Food Storage/Preservation Situation at the Seasoned Spoon**

As stated within the introduction of this report, the Seasoned Spoon has had a major food storage challenge for it has very limited and inadequate space to store food. Currently, the Seasoned Spoon utilizes one 6x4 freezer, one fridge, one elevator and space in and around cupboards within the Seasoned Spoon to store food. In some of this space, drying methods are being used. The Seasoned Spoon is also utilizing one fridge and cupboard space in the Champlain College Senior Common Room kitchen. Herbs and garlic are presently being stored in a closet where it is dark. Sometimes Seasoned Spoon members and growers store food at home and make deliveries as needed.

### **About Food Storage and Preservation**

Food storage and preservation requires knowledge and experience. However, it can easily be learned, adopted and successfully maintained over a long period of time. It must be acknowledged that food storage and preservation have played a central role in human life since the beginning of time and it is not until recently, since the industrial revolution and the invention of the freezer perhaps, that human beings have begun to forget how to store and preserve food. With the recent movement towards supporting sustainable agriculture and a sustainable food system, many people are looking back at traditional methods of storing and preserving food, and therefore strengthening their knowledge on food storage and preservation.

The main methods of storing and preserving food, include, storing food in a root cellar, drying food, canning food and fermenting/pickling, smoking and salting. These methods of storing and preserving, with the exception of canning, which emerged from the canning industry in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, are done in different variations throughout all cultures of the world. However, they all have the same basic principles. From the research that was conducted in this report it was found that the Seasoned Spoon is in most desperate need for food storage capabilities, with drying being less imperative and canning being the least imperative. For this reason, this report accentuates the storage and drying methods of food.

## **Food Storage**

Food storage is an easy and cost effective method of keeping many types of vegetables for a long period of time. Some vegetables can be stored up to a year in length! If fruits and vegetables are stored properly, most of their flavour can be kept as well (Harrison, 1996: 1). The requirements for preparing vegetables for storage and for storing them differ among the types of vegetables. For example, root vegetables and potatoes require a different relative humidity and temperature when stored than squash, pumpkin and onion. Many other common types of vegetables, such as cabbage and cauliflower, celery and endive and cucumbers, eggplant, peppers and tomatoes also require differing relative humidity and temperatures. Also, some vegetables cannot be stored together because they could encourage one another to ripen even faster. Something as simple as a room in a basement can be transformed into a storage cellar. As identified in the *analysis of result and recommendations* section of this report, more research must be done on properly building a storage cellar or transforming a room in a basement into a storage cellar. (See appendix B for detailed information on food storage and building a storage cellar)

## **Drying Food**

When food is dried it can, in most cases, be stored anywhere or in places that require very minimal attention. Many fruits and vegetables, ranging from corn and beans to squash and berries can be dried, however they are all dried through different methods. For example, as a traditional Haudenosaunee method, corn can be dried by braiding the husks together creating a long rope that can then be hung in a dry place. Beans, for example, can simply be left on their stalk to dry or can be placed on wire racks to dry in the sun. Drying food is generally an easy and cost effective method of preserving food all year long. As identified in the *analysis of results and recommendations* section of this report, more research must be conducted on the processes of drying different types of fruits and vegetables, and more attention must be brought to the importance of dry food for the Seasoned Spoon.

## **Key research goals**

### **Conduct a needs assessment of the current food storage capabilities of the Seasoned Spoon organization, and make recommendations for improvement.**

- Examine the role of the Seasoned Spoon in the local food system, the seasonal availability of food, and ways to preserve this food for the winter months.
- Make recommendations to the Seasoned Spoon on how to improve their food preservation.
- Understand the seasonality of food and how to preserve that food.
- Problem solve by working with Seasoned Spoon staff and looking creatively for ways to increase their capability to put away food.
- Look practically at the current resources available and find ways to use them more effectively.
- Do a comprehensive needs assessment based on the research findings.
- How much space and what types of space would the Seasoned Spoon need to store much of what they use during the winter?

## **Major findings**

The major findings of this report, based on consultations with Seasoned Spoon staff, volunteers and board members and Trent University staff and students, are as follows:

- The best solution to improve food storage is to find space to build a cold cellar in the basement of a building on campus. A room of high potential is Freezer Room 119, which is currently owned by Aramark and used for Aramark's garbage, compost and things not being used.
- Additional research must be conducted on looking for more options for food storage space in Champlain College and, as a last resort, in the other colleges on campus.
- The ability of the Seasoned Spoon to store its food in a location that is owned and operated by the Seasoned Spoon must be taken seriously. Having a location that is solely dedicated to the storage of the Seasoned Spoons' produce is very important.
- The Seasoned Spoon must constantly negotiate space for food storage until a permanent space can be created from an existing area or by transferred ownership.
- If more usable room for locally grown fruits and vegetables could be obtained, then it may be possible to add new recipes to the menu to be more local.
- Meri Kim Oliver told us, there may be space available where the firewood was stored for Champlain College, but no one is sure where this is located. Follow up with Physical Resources.
- There may also be space under the stairs leading to the Seasoned Spoon. It was once a wine cellar, but now it may be used by Conference Services. Follow up with Noranne Flower

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## **Section 2: Information**

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### **Timeline**

October 3, 2007 – Meeting with Jessi Dobyns  
October 11, 2007 – Preparing interview questions  
October 12, 2007 – Meeting with Annie Whitty  
October 19, 2007 – Background Paper  
November 1, 2007 – Study storage methods and researching completed TCCBE projects  
November 7, 2007 – Assessing produce storage needs  
November 15, 2007 – Meeting with Paula Anderson  
November 15, 2007 – Meeting with Aimee Blythe  
November 15, 2007 – Meeting with Annie Whitty  
November 20, 2007 – Emailed Stephen Brown  
November 20, 2007 – Emailed Tom Hutchinson about root cellars  
November 22, 2007 – Presentation  
November 22, 2007 – Meeting with Annie Whitty  
November 22, 2007 – Meeting with Meri Kim Oliver  
November 22, 2007 – Meeting with Milos Radovic  
November 22, 2007 – Emailed Milos Radovic, Wayne Craft, and Kathleen Easson  
November 28, 2007 – Meeting with Ian Arthur  
November 30, 2007 – Project assessment and reflection paper due  
December 10, 2007 – Emailed Milos Radovic  
December 10, 2007 – Emailed Stephen Brown  
December 11, 2007 – Emailed Noranne Flower  
December 14, 2007 – Final report due

## **Summary of Meetings with Consultants**

### **Jessi Dobyns**

*October 3, 2007*

At our meeting with Jessi on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, she recommended we speak with Aimee Blythe (co-ordinator of the rooftop and one acre garden), Annie Whitty (co-ordinator of the Seasoned Spoon café), Stephen Brown (Champlain Master), Ian (Seasoned Spoon's summer sourcer), and someone from Trent University's Physical Resources. Jessi explained to us that the SS is an independent business that constantly has to negotiate its space within the university. We were advised to make a presentation for the SS Board of Directors and to speak with Stephen Brown about space within Champlain College. On the topic of local food sourcing and how it pertains to the Food Storage Needs Assessment project, she gave us some recommendations to lead our research. Jessi mentioned that perhaps the local farmers have some storage facilities on premise and are willing to store food if the SS purchases food in advance and deliver it to the SS once a month. Buying in bulk benefits the farmers as much as it would the SS. The SS saves money and it is a guaranteed purchase for the farmer. Building a root cellar was mentioned as one of the avenues to explore. Some of the last words Jessi told us in response to my worries was, don't feel you have to solve everything! She advised us to include in the final report our recommendations and next steps for further research.

### **Annie Whitty**

*October 12, 2007*

We learned that food storage is vital to the community, not only the Seasoned Spoon. For example, if the Spoon can buy in bulk in advance, then they will be supporting local farmers. In the present situation, the Spoon can only buy as much food as they can store and unfortunately for the Spoon local farmers are selling their food so quickly that once it is gone, the Spoon has to buy from sources further away. Currently, there is food being stored in the Champlain College Senior Common Room kitchen and the out of use elevator shaft located in the Seasoned Spoon kitchen. Annie told us that even farmers are lacking food storage area and could be going through the same problems as the Seasoned Spoon. The Seasoned Spoon operates through a Tri-Partner Agreement with Aramark Canada and Trent University. Annie mentioned that the University of Toronto has utilized Local Flavour Plus, a non-profit organization that develops farmer and consumer relations through environmentally and socially accountable food production. Local Flavour Plus acts as a middleman, buying local food from farmers and supplying institutions and consumers.

*November 15, 2007*

The topic of this meeting with Annie revolved around building a root cellar. Annie gave us contact information of Chris Eaton, a Health Inspector and Health Instructor working for the Peterborough Health Unit. Chris Eaton might know the liability issues of storing food on a university campus. We found the big issue of building a root cellar is finding the space and who is going to pay for the building and maintenance. We talked a lot about spotlighting food safety and security on university

campus by addressing the problem and a permanent solution for storing food. For example, building a cold room is a meaningful, permanent solution to food storage, showcasing food security and community development. We discussed how much food the Seasoned Spoon goes through on a weekly basis (see Appendix A). Spoon members have stored potatoes in the past and perhaps some farmers are willing to do so. The local farms the Seasoned Spoon gets most of its food from are primarily Trent's rooftop garden and one acre farm, Sun Root Organics and Chick-a-Biddy Acres. We also brainstormed the idea of building a cold room as a TCCBE project or as a partnership with Habitat for Humanity or a partnership with the Sustainable Building Design and Construction program at Sir Sandford Fleming College. Annie advised us to speak with Stephen Brown, Meri Kim Oliver and Tom Hutchinson about available space and building a cold room. Annie told us that this is Stephen Brown's last year here at Champlain College Master. Annie described Stephen as being amazing with a very positive attitude toward the Seasoned Spoon operations. However, Annie is unsure of the future and if the next Champlain Master will be as helpful as Stephen has been.

Annie gave us a list of produce essential to the Seasoned Spoon:

Carrots, potatoes, garlic, Jerusalem artichokes, legumes, onions, cabbage, celeriac, beets, butternut squash, pumpkin, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, herbs, parsnips, beans, kale, collards, shallots, scallions, celery, leeks, cucumber, lettuce & salad greens, spinach, sweet potatoes, eggplant, rhubarb, rutabaga, sprouts, peppers...

*November 22, 2007*

In regards to the Freezer Room 119, Annie told us that if Aramark were to transfer ownership of the space over to the SS, the SS organization would incur the costs to make the space usable for storage. See the interview with Meri Kim Oliver below for more information.

### **Paula Anderson**

*November 15, 2007*

Paula advised us to find storage as close to the Seasoned Spoon as possible because of convenience and heaviness of produce. Local foods should be listed as main sources of meals for the Seasoned Spoon. To get idea of local foods, she suggested looking in the Kawartha Food Choice pamphlet and talking with Annie Whitty about the foods they want to use and the current list of suppliers. Paula also made a good suggestion of asking farmers at the Saturday and/or Wednesday market how they store their food. Paula mentioned there was a huge dug out cold storage by St. Joseph's Nunnery on Monaghan Road. The problem with this is Annie would still have to drive off campus to deliver and pick up food for the Seasoned Spoon. However, it could be large enough to economically store food with one drop off of food from local farmers.

**Aimee Blythe**

*November 15, 2007*

Aimee suggested we talk to farmers at the Saturday and Wednesday markets to find out how they are storing their food. Another suggestion was for us to speak with College Masters about space and Tom Hutchinson about cold storage. She told us that the limited space for storage is a real challenge because they can only harvest small amounts of food at a time from the Trent gardens. Aimee agreed cold storage is a good possibility, but we need to make sure we know the liabilities and work place safety to include as the first step in an action plan. Her advice was to start small and design an action plan to help stay on track and to share with others.

**Meri Kim Oliver**

*November 22, 2007*

The Senior Director of Student Affairs and Community Partnerships, Meri Kim Oliver has made many suggestions of important people to interview regarding food storage issues. Meri Kim suggested we speak with Milos Radovic, a Food Services employee with Aramark Canada about a freezer space located at the Champlain College loading dock, Room 119. She also mentioned that there may be unused space where Champlain College once used to store firewood and that Stephen Brown, Champlain Master, would know if this space is available. Meri Kim suggested we speak with Wayne Craft, a caretaker from Physical Resources about an acceptable place for a root cellar. Lastly, a garage in the Master's Lodge at Champlain College was mentioned as a possible place to store food. Unfortunately, I emailed the Alumni House and received a reply back from Kathleen Easson telling me that the garage was unfit for storage.

**Ian Arthur**

*November 28, 2007*

Ian Arthur is the summer sourcer for the Seasoned Spoon. He is responsible for storing foods during the summer for use during the school year when the Spoon is actually open. He agreed that we should look into finding an 8 x 10 space in the basement of Champlain College to store fruits and vegetables. Ian advised that one room was thought to be enough and not to worry about making another room to store apples and pears separately; they do not go through enough apples and pears to store from the beginning. Ian told me that freezing foods is labour intensive and it would only be necessary to have one more freezer half the size as the one currently being used. This freezer could be stored in the Champlain College Senior Common Room kitchen downstairs for easy access. He said, the only space we really need storage for are fruits and vegetables. Canned food and other preserves are currently being stored with enough room on a shelf in the Seasoned Spoon, but not a season's supply. There is no need to look for this kind of storage space, as canning is definitely the most labour intensive and he is not going to can enough food to make it an issue.

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## Section 3: Analysis of Results and Recommendations

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### Avenues Already Explored

1. The Alumni House garage is unsuitable for storing food
2. The space where firewood was once stored for the Senior Common Room at Champlain College may be available for food storage; however, it needs to be located.
3. A space under the stairs leading to the Seasoned Spoon that was once used as a wine cellar could be available for storing food. However, if Conference is using that space a trade may be necessary to gain access.

### Suggestions for Further Research

1. Freezer Room 119 at the Champlain College loading dock would be an excellent place to store food. Currently, it is designated to Aramark, but they are using it to store garbage, compost and things that are not being used. I met with Milos Radovic from Aramark, we visited Room 119 and he told me to email him and he would ask his managers about transferring ownership. An email was sent to Milos Radovic on November 22, 2007 about the Seasoned Spoon being interested in cleaning, fixing and making this space usable for storing food, but there has been no reply. A follow up email was sent on December 10, 2007, there has been no reply.

*→ Check back with Milos Radovic at Aramark and see if the space could be transferred over to the Seasoned Spoon.*

*→ Talk with Aramark, maybe they have space that is not being used or a freezer they would like to donate.*

2. Following a suggestion from Meri Kim Oliver, we sent out an email to Wayne Craft of Physical Resources asking about any space available that is fit for storing food. As of now there has been no reply.

*→ Follow up with Physical Resources. Find out if they have any available space on campus to store food. Ask about an acceptable place for a root cellar.*

*→ If ownership is transferred, design a TCCBE project action plan complete with cost estimates on making the space usable for cold storage.*

3. An email was sent out to Stephen Brown, Champlain College Master to see about any space available for food storage.

→ *Follow up by meeting up with Champlain College Master next year and ask about any available space within Champlain College.*

→ *Contact other College Masters to find out if they have any space available for food storage.*

4. The farmers selling their produce at the Saturday and Wednesday farmer markets must be storing their food to have it available over the season.

→ *Visit the Saturday and/or Wednesday farmers market and find out how they store their food.*

5. As a last resort, find out if there is cold storage available off campus. Paula Anderson mentioned there used to be (and possibly still is) a cold cellar at St. Joseph's. This could be a central location where farmers deliver their produce to the Seasoned Spoon.

→ *Ask the nuns at St. Joseph if there is cold storage space available. St. Joseph's is located off Monaghan Road, just south of Parkhill Road and Jackson's Park.*

6. Find out about health and safety regulations regarding a cold room on campus.

→ *Contact Chris Eaton at Peterborough Health Unit about health and safety issues of building a cold room, his information can be collected from Annie Whitty.*

8. Meri Kim Oliver mentioned firewood storage units that may be available for storing food. I mentioned this to Stephen Brown, who said that it would be fine for food storage, but neither of these people are sure of where these storage units are located.

→ *Ask Physical Resources if these firewood storage units are available in Champlain College and where they are located.*

9. Stephen Brown mentioned a wine cellar under the stairs going to the Seasoned Spoon; however, the space may be used by Conference Services. An email was sent to Noranne Flower about the availability of this space.

→ *Follow up with Noranne Flower. A trade for space may have to be worked out between Conference Services and the Seasoned Spoon.*

## **Review of Recommendations to Be Done Next Term**

→ *Definitely follow up with Physical Resources. Find out if they have any space in the basement of Champlain College or anywhere else, to donate as a cold storage room roughly 8 x 10 to the Seasoned Spoon. The room would have to be made air tight and insulated.*

- Follow up with Aramark to see if Freezer Room 119 could be transferred to the Seasoned Spoon.
- Design a TCCBE project as an action plan for converting a space into cold storage, include expenses.
- Invest in one more freezer half the size as is currently being used. See about locating the freezer in the Champlain College Senior Common Room kitchen.
- There is available space at Champlain College where firewood used to be kept. Find out where this space is and see if it is suitable for food.
- If there is no suitable space in Champlain College for food storage, meet with other College Masters to find out if they have any space for storing food.
- Look into Indigenous storage of fruits and vegetables, more specifically, methods of drying, storage and companion planting.
- Contact Chris Eaton at Peterborough Health Unit about health and safety regulations, regarding the building of a cold room in a basement on campus. Annie Whitty has his contact information.
- Research the problems and benefits of having a cold room.
- Design a TCCBE project on seasonal eating.
- Talk with farmers at the Saturday and Wednesday market, find out how they are storing their food.
- Get in touch with local farmers that already provide food for the Seasoned Spoon and find out if they are able to store the food if the food is bought in bulk in advance.
- Find ideas on building community relations between consumer and farmer that focus on local produce from the Local Flavour Plus website.
- Email Physical Resources and find out where the firewood storage units are located in Champlain College.
- Email Noranne Flower and find out if there is available space in the old wine cellar located in Champlain College. A trade may be necessary to gain access to the space.

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## Section 4: References

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