

Former London councillor speaks Oxford County on Food Revolution

Ron Thomson, Sentinel-Review

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Author and former London councillor Gord Hume speaks about food security at the Woodstock Quality Hotel & Suites on Tuesday night.

WOODSTOCK — - Food security is a growing concern to many North Americans due to increasing costs of living and fuel, along with instability in parts of the world.

Former London city councillor, Gord Hume, is among the concerned. Hume, who spent many years in the Canadian media and communications industry and is a public speaker, entrepreneur and author, spoke Tuesday night at the Woodstock Quality Hotel & Suites on the subject of his book, *The Local Food Revolution*.

Published in 2010, *The Local Food Revolution* focuses on the reasons why municipalities need to consider local food security when reshaping our communities.

There are a number of food issues in Canada and Oxford County, Hume said, including health implications, poverty, the

dwindling number of farms — the county has lost 400 farms in the last 20 years — and the amount of food waste.

“About 30% of kids going into kindergarten — these are three, four, five year olds — are overweight or obese. Six to 10 adults are overweight,” said Hume on the health implications.

This could lead to 400 million people with diabetes in the coming years, Hume said.

“We have not seen a health crisis like that and frankly our system can’t handle it,” he said.

Having a focus on local food and consuming local product is part of the solution. While there are issues in the county, there is a terrific opportunity for local food to shine, Hume said. Oxford County is a prime agricultural area and provides a location suitable for supporting local food production.

“We have some of the best farmland in the world in southern Ontario and Oxford County,” he said. “We need to treasure that, and frankly we need to do a better job sustaining it. We haven’t done a very good job.”

He talked about the importance of having policies in place to make food sustainable for future generations. Hume’s premise is policies are needed in the official plan to support agriculture and the production of food.

“We don’t have national policies on these things, we don’t have provincial policies on these things and we sure as hell don’t have local government policies on these things,” Hume said.

“Part of the problem, and frankly part of the solution, lies within our city and town halls. Municipalities are now the epicenter of this problem whether they know it or not or would like to or not.”

How cities are built and designed plays a role of the health of those who live in the communities. Traditionally, neighbourhoods were often built with people in mind so they would have easy access to amenities. However this is no longer the case.

“People who live in older neighbourhoods are leaner than people who live in modern suburbs,” Hume said. “We used to build subdivisions for people. Now we build them for cars.”

Part of the solution to the food crisis is education, Hume said. Many aren’t aware of the issue and many aren’t aware of how produce their own food or where to get it.

“Most adults probably couldn’t even garden anymore,” Hume said. “They don’t know how to plant.”

Creating community gardens could be part of the solution, Hume said. A community garden could create awareness while teaching how grow food and providing a place to do it, all while providing local produce.

“Take some empty yard downtown and turn it into a community garden,” Hume said. “Often a local school, church or neighbourhood group will take it on. You get that corner that was a wreck and you turn it into a lovely community garden. It improves the neighbourhood.”

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I think his suggestions are fantastic and that local leaders really need to consider and implement what he is suggesting for health and economic reasons as well. Every school could have even a small piece of land for growing vegetables. Last year in my daughter's grade 4 class, they each grew a green bean plant and she replanted hers at home. It really thrived and produced lots of beans and she was thrilled that it was HER plant. Food prices will only go up and yes there is a place for food banks, but let's educate and give a hand up not just a hand out.