



BARBARA SIMPSON/THE OBSERVER

Food Works coordinator Tara Pipe and Darren Hakker, co-founder and board chair of One Tomato, are pictured here in the Sarnia Cabinets Community Kitchen located at 100 Christina St. N. Volunteers of the Sarnia non-profit are toying with the idea of creating One Tomato-branded food products to help with the organization's long-term sustainability.

One Tomato products on the horizon

Sarnia non-profit focusing on self-sustainability with its community kitchen

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One Tomato – which has been on a mission to promote a healthy and sustainable local food system – has started sowing the seeds for its own long-term sustainability. Volunteers of the Sarnia non-profit are now toying with the possibility of creation and sale of One Tomato-branded food products in an effort to make the organization self-sustainable. All of the products would be prepared in-house at its downtown community kitchen, likely using produce from local farmers, said Darren Hakker, co-founder and board chair of One Tomato.

“That’s the point of the kitchen – to support local food but also One Tomato’s sustainability,” he said. “We hate asking for money.”

Only a year into its operation, One Tomato’s Sarnia Cabinets Community Kitchen has slowly been filling up with revenue-generating activity.

A local catering company and a small-scale food processor have started regularly renting out the community kitchen located at 100 Christina St. N.

“(The food processor) uses it a couple of days a week to make awesome food that she’s going to be selling at shows and events,” Hakker said.

All of the revenue generated from the kitchen supports One Tomato projects like its community gardens and Food Works healthy eating program.

About 1,000 local elementary students are expected to participate in this year’s edition of

the program that offers hands-on learning about the local food system.

Food Works coordinator Tara Pipe and a group of volunteers visit participating classes on a weekly basis to cook alongside students.

“It’s so much more than just reading about (healthy eating) in a textbook,” Hakker said. “Now they get to experience it, so it’s quite the beloved program. Teachers across the county love it and there’s a waiting list for teachers who want in.”

The Food Works program is currently funded with an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant through Goodwill Essex Kent Lambton.

In addition to gearing up for the upcoming Food Works program, Hakker said One Tomato volunteers have also been busy tending to community gardens this summer.

More than a dozen One Tomato gardens have been producing vegetables for its growers, neighbours and the Inn of the Good Shepherd.

“This year has been a little difficult for gardens because with the lack of the rain, weeds love lack of rain, so it’s been a struggle for volunteers to keep gardens weed-free, but the volunteers step up and make it happen and it’s no problem,” he said.

One Tomato was launched back in 2009 with a single garden.

“Things snowballed in a very good way,” Hakker said. “We’re very happy with where it’s headed.”

“We have a really strong board now that’s super excited about what’s next for One Tomato and strategizing about ways we can help take it where it needs to go.”

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