

# THE BIG CARROT

## CATEGORY:

POLICY | RESEARCH | FIELD | CLIMATE | **BUSINESS**

## LOCATION/SCALE:

Canada (Local)

## FOUNDER:

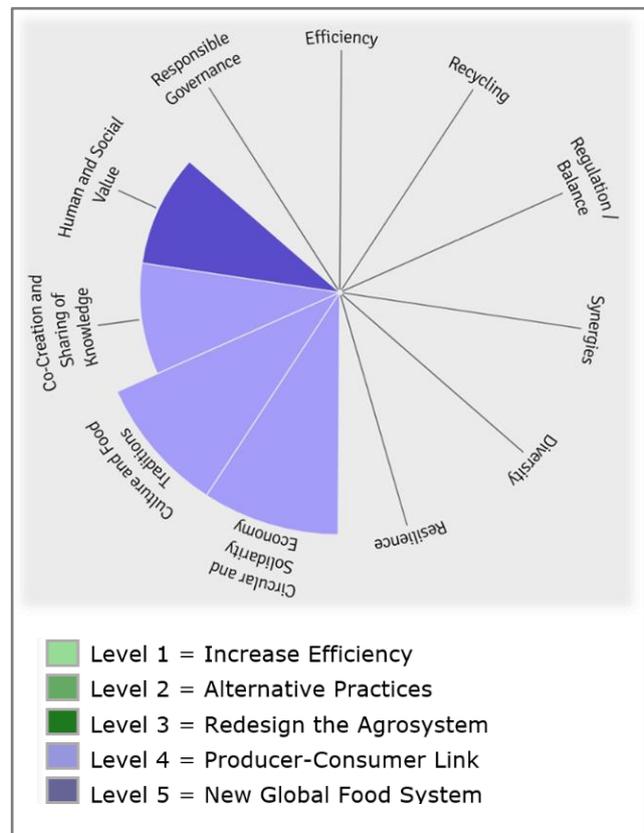
9 Founding Partners (worker owned co-operative)

## PERIOD:

1983 - now

## IN A NUTSHELL

Operated based on the principles of a worker-owned co-operative, The Big Carrot was the first health food store to offer a one stop shopping experience with a vegetarian deli, organic produce department and a selection of frozen natural meat products. The Big Carrot has grown into Canada's largest worker owned natural food market selling their products in two different locations near Toronto. They continue to set standards for quality and selection of natural foods while still maintaining the same democratic non-corporate agenda as when they first opened. The Big Carrot strengthened its commitment to good organic stewardship by certifying its processing and packaging of over 700 organic products in the juice bar, bulk, spice, cheese and produce departments. Acknowledging the fact that conventional agriculture degrades the health of soils, ecosystems and people, they decided to support and promote alternative agriculture techniques. By purchasing from small local, organic producers and by ensuring that each product meets a set of rigorous standards, they aim at the development of a healthy and sustainable food system. Consumer and employee education on social and environmental issues is at the centre of their work.



**Figure: Assessment of The Big Carrot based on FAO Elements of Agroecology and Gliessman's five levels of food system change**

## CONTEXT

The immense size of the country contributed to Canada being one of the largest agricultural producers and exporters in the world. Currently, only 3% of its population are employed as farmers who are able to feed the rest of the nation's population as well as export to foreign markets. Nevertheless, one of the fastest growing segments of Canadian agriculture are organic products with now more than 3700 registered organic food producers achieving double digit annual growth in retail sales over the past decade. Between 2011 and 2017, organic farmland increased by more than 45 percent, while total agricultural land remained almost stable with a one percent decrease.

## OBJECTIVE

In order to reach their goal of a healthy society, The Big Carrot offers high quality products, information services, competitive prices and ongoing public education to make organic and eco-labelled food selection easy. The Big Carrot is committed to support the production of organic, non-GMO and local food, to carry fairly traded products that support social justice and fair labour and to promote sustainable and healthy livestock production.

## KEY INTERVENTIONS

### REGIONAL/NATIONAL LEVEL:

- Offering education outreach and specific trainings to share knowledge and improve public education on social and environmental issues
- Providing complimentary nutritional tours on topics such as achieving optimum health, understanding organic food and food sensitivities
- Donating a percentage of their annual profits back to the local community and non-profit organizations with common goals
- Fostering consumer education, The Big Carrot shares a comprehensive blog and numerous recipes with healthy, functional and good tasting food with its customers
- Partnering with Localize, a shelf-labelling service that highlights over 1100 Ontario-made products from 116 Ontario-owned businesses and therefore helps customers to identify local products in their stores

## LESSONS LEARNED/CHALLENGES

Private companies do not have to be hierarchically structured to grow and follow their vision. From the 9 founding partners, The Big Carrot expanded to a worker cooperative consisting of currently over 70 members. As part of their vendor community, they now have direct relationships with 250 local Ontario producers and suppliers. Over the last 18 years, their non-profit organization Carrot Cache, which supports small organic agriculture projects in Ontario, granted over \$2.1 million to organizations and individuals. In order to further influence and spread the idea of alternative agriculture techniques, they could intensify their knowledge sharing in the domains of biodiversity, the use of synergies as well as the resilience against climate change. In order to widen their positive influence, the worker cooperative would have to expand from consumer and public education to encouraging inclusive policy making such as the development of school feeding programs or campaign for national level programs, regulations and subsidies. Furthermore, they could establish a link between alternative farming methods and global changes.

## RELEVANT LINKS & REFERENCES

- The Big Carrot Homepage  
<https://thebigcarrot.ca/>
- Homepage of their co-financed Non-Profit Organization Carrot Cache  
<https://www.carrotcache.com/>
- Blog entry from Wearefromthefarm  
<https://bit.ly/36WJTts>

