

## ?Good food? is given healthy boost by foundation



**By Jeff Doner**

The York Region Food Network received a financial boost from the McKesson Foundation, who donated \$20,000 to go toward the YRFN's Good Food by Kids project last week.

?It is amazing because it will allow us to do some more kids' programming around this,? said Joan Stonehocker, executive director of York Region Food Network. ?We're also doing some cooking programs with kids in some of the social units across York Region, which is a really good way to integrate them with not only cooking, but seeing how things grow, where their food comes from and what is healthy.?

Good Food by Kids has been focusing on building food literacy and food skills among children from ages 6 to 12 by helping them learn to prepare meals to share with their family.

The McKesson Foundation holds a Canada-wide grant campaign every year to provide financial assistance to a number of non-profit organizations whose mission is to assist children and youth in the areas of health, education and poverty. This year \$250,000 was given out to 15 organizations across Canada with the YRFN as one of the lucky finalists.

Leslie Dungog, a McKesson representative who helped sift through the 156 applications, said the YRFN's program ?stood out? for a number of reasons.

?It's important for someone young to think about their health and what it means to them,? she said. ?This is a great way to introduce it, so I thought it was pretty cool. We're a pharmaceutical company, so we look at healthcare and we expanded to things that had to do with kids. I've never seen anything like this.?

Dungog presented the cheque to the YRFN at the upStream location in Newmarket, which grows fresh produce through aquaponics.

Stonehocker said the location just recently opened up with the help and enthusiasm of a volunteer named Steve Looi.

?He said we should put aquaponic units in food banks because then they would have more fresh food,? Stonehocker explained. ?We're trying to let people go get their food in their own way, but we really liked the idea. There was some social enterprise funding from the Ontario government, so we got a really small grant and that's what we started from.?

Stonehocker said the location should be able to put out 200 ? 250 heads of lettuce per week, as well as a few other products all year round.

The location farms tilapia, held in tanks which collect their solids as fertilizer.

?Steve went on a commercial aquaponics course in San Francisco to learn all about it on his own,? Stonehocker continued. ?He's so

excited about it and his enthusiasm has carried through the whole project. The whole system was built from volunteers and Home Depot donated some of the wood and Canadian Tire has been really helpful in donating materials.?

The plan for the foods is to sell them locally, although the details still need to be ironed out by the YRFN.

?We're looking at marketing them locally, so we've already talked to the restaurants on Main Street (Newmarket) and they will be used in some of our community kitchen programs, we're thinking of marketing them to commuters, so that people can grab lettuce that was grown right here,? she said.

?Everything that I've ever tasted out of one of these units is really yummy.?