Menu 2020

Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario

Metcalf Food Solutions

Lauren Baker, Philippa Campsie & Katie Rabinowicz for Sustain Ontario — The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming

With research assistance from Marc Michalak, Linda Rosengarten, Phoebe Stephens & Valerie Ward

June 2010

METCALF FOUNDATION

Metcalf Foundation

The Metcalf Foundation helps Canadians imagine and build a just, healthy, and creative society by supporting dynamic leaders who are strengthening their communities, nurturing innovative approaches to persistent problems, and encouraging dialogue and learning to inform action.

Authors

Lauren Baker is the founding director of Sustain Ontario — The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming, a membership-based organization that advocates for healthy food and sustainable agriculture. Lauren has more than 15 years' experience developing local food economies, sustainable agriculture programs, and food policy. She has a Ph.D. in Environmental Studies from York University, is a research associate with the Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson University, and lectures at the University of Toronto.

Philippa Campsie is an adjunct professor in the graduate planning program at the University of Toronto, and principal of Hammersmith Communications. In 2008 she wrote *Food Connects Us All* for the Metcalf Foundation, and in 2000 and 2001 she helped draft the interim and final reports of the City of Toronto's Food and Hunger Action Committee and the Toronto Food Charter.

Katie Rabinowicz is the Environment Program Officer (Acting) for the Metcalf Foundation and a DiverseCity Fellow. Katie previously worked for Sustain Ontario and the City of Toronto and she co-founded/directed Multistory Complex, a planning organization that helped reform the province's street food vending regulations. She has worked on food issues for a number of years and has a master's degree in planning from York University.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who contributed ideas for this paper. Each Good Food Idea was formed in consultation with advisors who are working on concrete initiatives to move these issues forward. We would also like to thank Sustain Ontario's steering committee and advisory council (see Appendix 2).

Contents

Foreword 4
Executive Summary 6
The Good Food Gap 9
Idea 1: Support Producers of Locally Consumed Fruit, Vegetables, and Meats....16
Idea 2. Make Room for New Farmers and Alternative Markets within the Supply-Managed System 20
Idea 3. Harvest the Whole Value of Ecological Services from Agriculture..... 23
Idea 4: Plant Urban Ontario 26
Idea 5: Implement a School Food Program, and Embed Food Literacy in the Curriculum 28
Idea 6: Support Community Food Centres 31
Idea 7: Establish Local Food Infrastructure through Regional Food Clusters..... 33
Idea 8: Expand Public Procurement of Local, Sustainably Produced Food..... 36
Idea 9: Link Good Food with Good Health 39
Idea 10: Plan for the Future of Farming and Food 42
Advancing Ontario's Good Food Ideas..... 45
Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations..... 48
Appendix 2: Sustain Ontario Steering Committee and Advisory Council.....51
References 53

Foreword

Food — how and where we grow, process, distribute, sell, and eat it — is a fundamental human concern and central to the health of our communities, economy, environment, and bodies. Food is elemental, yet the system we have built around it is complex, rigid, and opaque.

There is growing concern that our current food system is not working well — some would say it is broken. In Ontario, many farmers are facing an income crisis. Too many people lack access to healthy food. And, despite growing demand for local food, our centralized, large-scale food processors, distributors, and retailers are unable to provide it.

Efforts to rebuild the local food supply chain and restructure Ontario's food and agriculture system have been building momentum in the last few years. Ontario's residents are expressing a burgeoning desire to create a food system that is more sustainable, equitable, and economically viable.

For the past eight years, the Metcalf Foundation has been seeding and supporting food- and agriculture-related initiatives across the province, from agricultural land trusts to sustainable food certification, from new farm incubators to low-income neighbourhood farmers' markets, from diversified forms of street food to new models for community food hubs.

Starting in 2007, we convened our funding partners who were working on the supply and equitable distribution of local, sustainable food. We wanted to explore the possibilities for cooperative, integrated efforts to transform Ontario's food and agriculture system. These gatherings led to the creation of Sustain Ontario – the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming which, after only one year of operation, is already playing a central role in supporting the efforts of its growing membership. The discussions also led to our publishing the paper *Food Connects Us All: Sustainable Local Food in Southern* Ontario in February 2008, which identified some of the barriers to a local, sustainable food system and the many roads to change.

Building on that first paper, in 2009 we decided to focus on solutions, rather than just the obstacles to progress. We have learned about innovators and activists, academics and growers who are engaged in new ways of understanding and engaging with food systems. Yet too little of this experimentation and innovation has been entering the policy conversation. We issued a call for proposals seeking tangible ways to advance a local, sustainable food system agenda in Ontario over the next five to ten years.

The call inspired a strong response — and difficult choices for the Foundation. We commissioned five papers, each authored collaboratively by NGOs, academics, practitioners, and others representing a range of sectors and perspectives. The papers are intended to be at once pragmatic and inspiring — looking to craft responses that more meaningfully connect food to critical societal issues such as health, urban sprawl, poverty and hunger, declining farm incomes, and communities at risk.

We hope these papers will provide a platform for a more robust discussion of the possibilities for food system reform in Ontario. But we also want to move beyond discussion. Public interest, civil society engagement, academic focus, and government awareness has never been higher on this issue. We want to stimulate multi-sectoral cooperation in advancing credible, grounded solutions that can be brought into action.

We recognize that there are multiple paths to change, and that innovation often comes from bridging issues and sharing visions for the future. The Foundation thanks the innovators whose ideas and actions are sowing a new vision for food and farming in Ontario.

Sandy Houston, President
Metcalf Foundation

Executive Summary

Ontario is growing good food ideas.

These ideas are based on a recognition that through food, a variety of social, cultural, environmental, and economic problems that Ontarians face can be addressed. They represent solutions to a broken food system in which farmers find it challenging to make a living growing food, and consumers find it difficult to make the good food choices they want to make.

This paper is part of a series of papers commissioned by the Metcalf Foundation. *Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario*, unlike the other papers in this series, does not look at a single issue, but draws on a range of good food ideas currently being discussed in Ontario, and knits together ten that would contribute to health and economic viability along the food chain. Each of the ideas has multiple societal benefits, involves many stakeholders, and requires integrated policy support.

This paper is the outcome of the first year of work for Sustain Ontario – The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming. Sustain Ontario was created following a two-year process led by the Metcalf Foundation that brought together diverse groups and organizations working on farm and food issues in Southern Ontario in the areas of health, community, farming, and the environment. The Metcalf Foundation wanted to explore the local appetite for co-operative, integrated work with the goal of transforming Ontario's farming and food systems. Participants in this process identified a need for collaborative policy and advocacy work at the provincial level.

As a result, in late 2008 Sustain Ontario was formed as a provincial alliance that would research and develop policy proposals related to healthy food and local sustainable farming. Sustain Ontario's mandate is to advocate for a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable, and financially viable.

Throughout 2009 Lauren Baker, Sustain Ontario's director and the lead author of this paper, spoke with people across the province to better understand the farm and food landscape. In particular, she explored local responses to global efforts to *Bring Food Home*.[1] These efforts are not intended to forestall trade, but to question and rethink the terms of trade. They reflect an increased interest in cooking and eating local food, improving school food programs, and developing local, sustainable institutional procurement policies. People who care

[1] *Bring Food Home* is the title of a conference held in March 2010 in Kitchener, Ontario. Thanks to Joan Brady, Ontario FoodNet coordinator, for coining the term *bring food home* and describing its many dimensions.

about food are seeking out new ways to source it, connect with farmers, and bridge urban and rural divides. Community Shared Agriculture, food box programs, and farmers' markets are multiplying. Farmers are seeking new ways to market the fruits of their labour and connect directly with consumers. Regional labels, local marketing efforts, and agri-tourism opportunities are expanding across Ontario. Low-income communities and their advocates have identified good food as a way to address the health, social, and economic costs of poverty. The work of organizations like Just Food in Ottawa, FoodShare and The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto, and Huron-Perth Farm to Table, have demonstrated that supporting local farmers and feeding hungry people are not irreconcilable goals. These organizations also link food to health outcomes, and advocate for our most vulnerable citizens, who need access to healthy and affordable food.

The ten good food ideas presented here are as follows:

1. Support producers of locally consumed fruit, vegetables, and meats.
2. Make room for new farmers and alternative markets within the supply-managed system.
3. Harvest the whole value of ecological goods and services from agriculture.
4. Plant urban Ontario.
5. Implement a school food program, and embed food literacy in the curriculum.
6. Support community food centres.
7. Establish local food infrastructure through regional food clusters.
8. Expand public procurement of local, sustainably produced food.
9. Link good food with good health.
10. Plan for the future of farming and food.

These ideas come from initiatives that are currently being promoted by food and farm leaders across Ontario. These leaders are part of an increasingly strong and dynamic civil society sector involved in building, organizing, and advocating for food system sustainability. The sector includes non-profit community groups, environmental organizations, small and medium-sized food enterprises, municipal agencies, health units, commodity organizations, and educational institutions[2] — all working to fix broken food systems.

These groups represent a "symphony"[3] of non-state voices demanding policy change. Responding to this symphony represents a challenge for governments. Often the music of the symphony is neither in tune nor in tempo. The best and most appropriate path forward is unclear. The ten ideas presented in this paper

[2] MacRae 2009. Sustain Ontario's membership reflects this sectoral diversity; see http://sustainontario.com/members/directory.
[3] Winfield 2007.

are therefore attempts to frame diverse civil society proposals within a common policy framework. They reflect an integrated view of farming and food, and of health and economic viability along the food chain.

Four of the good food ideas have emerged from other Metcalf Foundation Food Solution papers, published concurrently with *Menu 2020*. What is presented here is a synopsis of the research conducted for those papers. The other six ideas are gleaned from proposals, activities, discussion, and campaigns currently circulating in farm and food networks across Ontario.

The recommendations are presented as discussion points. Sustain Ontario is interested in working with governments at all levels to develop focused strategies to implement these ideas. That means answering questions such as: How can we harness the power of these good food ideas? How can we scale them up so that they reach more people? What priorities emerge across the good food ideas? How can we create policies, programs, and regulations that result in the multiple societal benefits a healthy, ecological, equitable, and financially viable food system would provide? How do we move from action to policy and back to more action?

In the proliferation of good food ideas across the province lie the seeds of solutions to some of the economic, health, social, and environmental crises in Ontario. Reaping the harvest of these seeds requires new governance structures, focused investment, policy shifts, and good program design.[4]

This paper is presented in three sections. First, we examine the good food gap as a way to understand the interconnected farm income and health crises we face, and link these crises to the way in which agriculture and health policy has been framed over the past 65 years. The consequences of the good food gap for farmers, eaters, the environment, the health care system, and the economy are discussed. The ten good food ideas are elaborated on in the middle section. The concluding section identifies common priorities that run through the ten good food ideas and outlines specific actions that can be taken in Ontario to close the good food gap.

[4] Koc et al. 2008.

The Good Food Gap

A sweeping review of food policy, food and farming industry news, global reports, and local media reveals a good food gap that results in unforeseen and unacceptable consequences for farmers, eaters, the environment, the health care system, and the economy. This good food gap is not just an Ontario phenomenon. It is a global problem that requires multi-jurisdictional solutions.

What is the good food gap?

The good food gap represents the policy space separating the farm income crisis from the health crisis — in other words, the fact that farmers find it difficult to make a living growing food, and consumers find it difficult to make the good food choices they want to make.

The Farm Income Crisis

A brief glance at farm market net income from the mid-1980s to the present illustrates the shocking impact of global restructuring in the farm and food sector. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture notes:

> Statistics from pork, beef and horticulture indicate massive losses on all products sold to export. Horticulture continues to lose money to low cost, low quality imported foods as well. Such imports are blamed for the recent fruit and vegetable processing plant closures in Southwestern Ontario. The ripple effect of such industry devastation must also be considered. Over 752,000 jobs in Ontario alone rely on a solid farm sector — many of which keep our rural communities alive. Agriculture is linked to transportation, processing and the retail industries, to name a few.[5]

Since 1985, the average market net income for farmers has been below that of 1930s levels. A recent report describes the main problems in the sector:

- 52% of Ontario's farmers are losing money.
- Between 1996 and 2006, Ontario lost 15% of its farms.
- People are moving out of the Ontario countryside.
- Most Ontario farmers earn most of their income from off-farm jobs.
- Ontario farmers are aging, and few new farmers are taking their place.

These trends are compounded by rising energy prices, increasingly onerous regulatory regimes, and the steadily falling percentage of income that consumers spend (and expect to spend) on food (24% in 1960, 11% today[6]).

What are the implications of these trends?

---

[5] Letter from Ontario Federation of Agriculture President Geri Kamenz to Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Gerry Ritz regarding the ongoing farm income crisis, January 25, 2008.
[6] Canada's Office of Consumer Affairs 2004.

First, the value chain that connects farmers to consumers is out of balance. A greater proportion of the food dollar that consumers spend is going to those in the middle of the chain — mostly large-scale processors and distributors — and is not reaching the original producers of food.

Second, Ontario's agriculture policy is skewed towards exporting food, not producing food for local consumption. Over the past decade, exports have grown by 28%, while imports grew by 32%.[7] The upshot is the absurdity known as "redundant trade," whereby products are both exported as commodities and imported as food. Such trade represents lost economic opportunities.

Third, the fastest-growing local markets are underserviced. These include markets for products from local and organic or sustainable producers, as well as processed food created by small and medium-sized enterprises. These businesses represent potential jobs and other economic opportunities that are not being realized.

Fourth, Ontario's countryside is being hollowed out at the same time as farmland close to urban markets is disappearing due to city expansion. Urban sprawl not only has cultural, environmental, and economic ramifications, but also represents a permanent loss of agricultural potential for Ontario.

Finally, despite concerns about sustainability, Ontario's agriculture is being reshaped by technology and consolidation, often with harmful environmental effects. Soils are degraded through poor land-management practices, fertilizers and pesticides contaminate water sources, and long-distance transportation adds to carbon emissions.

The farm crisis exists even though poll after poll suggests that Ontarians care deeply about farmland preservation and the economic viability of rural communities.[8] That concern tells us that the time is right for gathering support for efforts to bring about real change in the Ontario food system.

The Health Crisis

Over the past two decades, as education, income, and health inequities grow globally, we have seen an exponential growth in the startling coexistence of malnutrition and obesity.[9] Despite per-capita increases in global food supplies, progress to reduce the number of undernourished people has been slow and uneven, an indication that the problem is not one of supply, but of distribution and access. Around the world, urbanization has exacerbated social and economic disparities,[10] as have soaring food and fuel prices.

---

[7] Seccombe 2007,10.
[8] See, for example, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation 2009.
[9] Institute for the Future. No date. See also Patel 2007.
[10] World Health Organization 2008.

The "Ontario Hunger Report 2009: Living with Hunger," prepared by the Ontario Association of Food Banks, states that the number of people using food banks rose by 19% in 2009.[11] For low-income citizens, there is simply not enough money to purchase a full complement of good food each week, and this results in poor health outcomes. At the same time, adults and young people across Ontario, regardless of income levels, eat too much fat, sugar, and salt.

Structural barriers to healthy eating in our communities result in uneven access to healthy food. Within Ontario cities, there are areas known as "food deserts," neighbourhoods in which people are unable to purchase good food locally. Public transportation to supermarkets is infrequent or lacking entirely. Across the province the cost of a nutritious food basket varies widely, and often those with the lowest incomes live in areas where food costs are high.[12] Unhealthy food environments result in unhealthy people.

Ontario's population is increasingly diverse and its people represent a wide array of food cultures and preferences. Immigrant communities are driving a growing demand for culturally appropriate foods, including fresh produce that could be grown on Ontario farms, but has not previously been cultivated here. The inability to access culturally appropriate food represents a health challenge for Ontario and lost economic opportunities for farmers.

Recent research shows that Ontarians are paying for the mistake of not linking food with health outcomes.[13] Statistics Canada has found that 26% of children aged 6 to 11 are overweight or obese.[14] The percentage rises to 28% for Canadian teenagers and a staggering 61% for Canadian adults.

What are the consequences of this health crisis?

First, Ontarians are increasingly unhealthy, particularly children and youth, who are facing new health problems such as diabetes at greatly increased rates. As many commentators have noted, after decades in which members of each generation could expect to live longer, healthier lives than those in the preceding generation, this trend has been reversed. In many families, the children may live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents.

Second, the crisis is acute for the most vulnerable Ontarians. Income assistance rates do not provide enough money to purchase good food. Social inequities faced by low-income Ontarians are thus compounded by health problems. Many people with low incomes live in areas where it is hard to secure fresh, healthy food, and rely heavily on convenience stores and packaged foods for their diet. As a result, many suffer from obesity and health problems related to it, or from other health problems related to nutritional deficiencies.

---

[11] Ontario Association of Food Banks 2009.
[12] Association of Local Public Health Agencies 2009.
[13] Dubé et al. 2009.
[14] Heart and Stroke Foundation. No date.

Finally, we are seeing the decline of food literacy, that is, the ability of people to shop for and cook food in a healthy way; choosing and preparing the most economical and healthy foods (from high-fibre grains and dried beans to inexpensive cuts of meat) requires some knowledge.

The health crisis is growing, despite consumer trends over the past decade that point to increasing concerns about health and increased interest in the source of food. Many people want to eat whole, unprocessed, and fresh ingredients. They care about where their food comes from, whether or not there are genetically modified organisms or hormones in the food they eat, how much salt is in processed food, and whether the food was grown under conditions of good labour practices and environmental sustainability. Quality, safety, environmental impact, human health, labour standards, and animal welfare are all aspects of food that many eaters care about. Many Ontarians see food as fundamental to their personal health and the health of their communities, but they cannot always make the connection to the kind of food they want.

Foundations of the Good Food Gap

The good food gap lies between the farm income crisis and the health crisis. Pushing these issues farther and farther apart are a number of tensions and contradictions in the way we think about farming and food. The good food gap is a result of agricultural and health policies that are historically narrow in focus, with unconnected objectives and outcomes. By understanding the way that our agriculture and health policies perpetuate the twin crises causing the good food gap, we can begin to understand how our policy structures need to shift to address the gap.

A survey of public policy in agriculture and health over the past 80 years helps to understand the roots of the good food gap.[15]

In the United States and Canada, following the Great Depression and the Second World War, agricultural policy was restructured to deal with the farm income and food price crises of the time. It was widely acknowledged that the market could provide stability for neither farmers nor consumers. Agricultural inputs, research, and credit were subsidized, the processing sector was supported, and trade protection measures were implemented.[16] In the 1980s, with the signing of NAFTA and the development of increasingly globalized food-supply chains, the intended results of these efforts were eroded. Corporate consolidation of the agricultural industry, low commodity prices, high interest rates, and rising farm debt contributed to steadily falling farm incomes.

[15] Chang 2009; Skogstad, G. 2008; Toronto Food Policy Council 1997.
[16] Skogstad 2008.

Grace Skogstad, agriculture policy expert, refers to the period from the 1940s to the present as the "state-assisted agricultural paradigm."[17] What this means is that Canadian agriculture policy is based on the recognition that agriculture is an exceptional sector, providing a number of public goods to society and requiring support from the government in order to do so. However, the current focus on export markets, a regulatory regime designed for global food-supply chains, and fragmented governance and policy prevent the sector from realizing the potential societal benefits of farming and food. Current state support structures are not designed to support farm viability, strong rural economies, environmentally sound production practices, food safety, or the protection of biodiversity.

Over the same period since the Second World War, the Canadian health care system as we know it was established. In 1948 the National Health Grant Program was created to build public hospitals. The *Canada Health Act* was passed in 1984, outlining federal health transfer grants and the standards to which the provinces must comply.

Canadian health policy is built on the assumption that access to health care should be universal, and reflects a "service provision paradigm." But the current health care system cannot control health care expenditures, has not lowered rates of sickness and disease, and has not fostered a culture of health and wellness. Although public health policy clearly acknowledges the links between food and health, diet-related illnesses are rising and Canadian per capita health care expenditures have doubled from about $1,700 in 1975 to about $3,600 (measured in 1997 dollars).[18]

The good food gap has arisen because these approaches — to agriculture on the one hand and to health on the other — have failed to deliver the desired outcomes. What policy frames would bridge the gap?

The Bridge

Several policy frameworks offer a new way to think about farming, food, and health.

An international report published in 2009 by the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization reviewed the state of agricultural knowledge, science, and technology since 1945.[19] This important review was followed by detailed recommendations for specific regions, including North America. The concept of multifunctionality was put forward, recognizing agriculture as a multi-output activity producing not only agricultural products (food, feed, agrofuels, medicinal products), but also non-food outputs such as environmental

[17] Ibid.
[18] Toronto Food Policy Council 1997.
[19] International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology on Development 2009.

services, landscape amenities, and cultural heritage. The report acknowledges the role that food and agriculture play in reducing hunger and poverty, strengthening rural communities, improving human health, and contributing to equitable and sustainable social, environmental, and economic development. It provides a solid foundation for an integrated policy framework that links economic viability and health along the food chain.

Over the past several decades, changes to the *European Union Common Agricultural Policy* have resulted in the implementation of a multifunctional approach in many European countries. A concrete example of this shift towards multifunctionality in the United Kingdom can be seen in the *Natural England* program. Through this program, farmers are offered incentives to provide a variety of ecological and social goods and services on their farms.[20]

A recent report published by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute draws on the idea of multifunctionality, outlining a "whole of society approach" to "improv(e) the well-being of Canadians by providing safe, nutritious and accessible food that supports healthy eating, contains health care costs, and is promoted by innovative and sustainable agricultural, food and health sectors."[21] This approach, the authors state, would require co-operation that spans government agencies, multiple levels of government, industry, and health care providers. Furthermore, stakeholders would work together to create a more inclusive approach to policy development. Connecting the health challenges facing Canadians to the challenges that many farmers experience around the country, the report links farming, food, and health problems.

The concept of multifunctionality could be strengthened by a health promotion perspective. In Canada, the 1974 Lalonde Report "A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians" provided recommendations for addressing the structural problems that stand in the way of better health. This report was based on the ideas of health promotion and the social determinants of health. Its policy framework focused on the context necessary for maintaining and improving Canadians' health — food, shelter, income, social equity, economic stability, and sustainable resources.[22]

Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario proposes a new policy framework for Ontario. Drawing on the notion of multifunctionality, Ontario must align food systems policies with public health policies to promote economic viability and health along the food chain.

---

[20] See http://www.naturalengland.org.uk
[21] Dubé et al. 2009. See above.
[22] Government of Canada 1974.

Bridging the Gap

To overcome the good food gap we must link health, sustainability, and economic viability in the food system. This means creating structures and incentives that foster a healthier, more sustainable, and economically viable farming and food system.

Ontario, like many jurisdictions, faces a complex farm, food, and health policy-making environment. The economic crisis and current budgetary constraints demand creative solutions that recognize this complexity. The ten good food ideas presented in this paper reflect a new, integrated way of thinking about farming, food, and health, and could represent incremental changes towards integrating our agri-food and health policies.

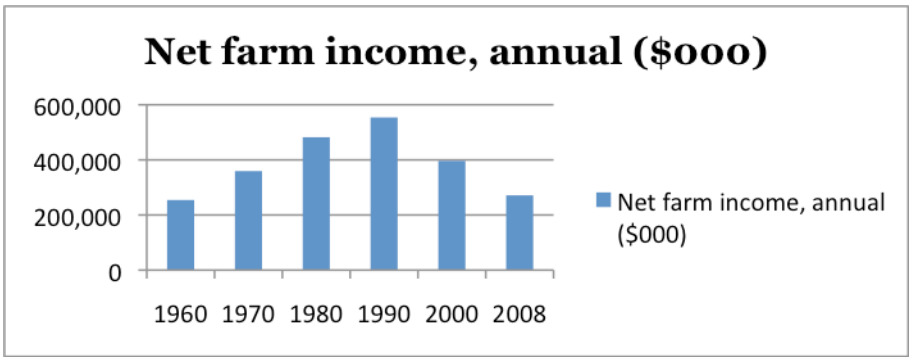
In the following chapters, we show that the good food gap as we have described it here consists of a series of smaller gaps between the elements of the food system. In each section, we identify ways to build health and economic viability along the food chain and recommend concrete steps that can be taken right now to bridge the many good food gaps.

Idea 1: Support Producers of Locally Consumed Fruit, Vegetables, and Meats[23]

The $1.2-billion fruit, vegetable, and meat sector represents:

- 7,500 fruit and vegetable farmers and their families
- 30,000-plus non-family on-farm jobs
- 100 different fruit and vegetable crops
- 19,000 cattle farmers
- 2,800 hog farmers
- additional jobs in food processing, packaging, trucking, and supplies

Hundreds of rural communities depend on jobs created through agriculture and food. And in cities, millions of people depend on the good food grown on Ontario farms. Today the farm and food sectors are under tremendous financial stress due to low-priced imports, rising input costs, and an inability to cover these costs in the market place. A look at net farm incomes in Ontario agriculture illustrates the severity of the problem.



Note that the effect of the minimum wage increase is not included in the 2006-2008 average.

The decline has affected different parts of the sector to different extents. Revenues have dropped by 25% for apples, 43% for greenhouse-grown produce, 51% for tender fruits, and 10% for other fruits and vegetables. Similarly, there has been a steady decline in the numbers of cattle and hogs raised in Ontario between 2004 and 2009.

[23] Advisors: Vic Daniels (beef sector consultant), Elbert van Donkersgoed (pork sector consultant), Art Smith.

Where Is the Gap?

Several factors have led to this decline in farm income. Consolidation of the retail sector, low global commodity prices, and rising energy and input costs have reduced the portion of the food dollar that farmers get from the sale of food. A flood of cheap agricultural products (such as lettuce) from the United States into the Canadian market has also made it difficult for Ontario producers to stay competitive. Between 2007 and 2009, six Ontario fruit and vegetable processing facilities closed. This has led to smaller markets for horticultural products. The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA) calculates that 30,000 on-farm jobs and 8,700 food-processing jobs have been lost. A similar loss has been felt in the pork and beef sector, with the closing of many farms and small abattoirs across the province.

The recent Ontario minimum wage increase has been deeply felt in the fruit and vegetable sector. Wages in the horticultural sector, as a percentage of farm costs, are up to five times higher than in other agricultural sectors. The OFVGA clearly states its support for wage increases, but has asked the provincial government to assist specific sectors that are unable to pay the higher costs, if they cannot be passed on to consumers. This is the case for fruit and vegetable growers.[24]

Ontarians have very little understanding of the true cost of the food they eat. The price in the grocery store does not reflect the costs of environmental degradation, the costs of unhealthy eating, long-distance transportation, or the billions of dollars of farm support. Paying farmers directly for the real costs they incur to grow good food puts money directly into farmers' pockets and perhaps saves money overall. Buying directly from farmers and paying the true cost of food also makes it possible for consumers to have a say in the kind of farm practices they want to support.

One gap exists between the kinds of program supports offered to Ontario farmers and the outcomes of these supports in terms of farm viability and sustainable practices. Another gap exists between what farmers spend on growing food and the share of the retail dollar they receive in return.

The Bridge

In supply-managed sectors, prices are linked to costs, therefore these sectors are protected. For example, the grain and oilseed sector has a federal-provincial cost-shared risk management pilot program that ensures the sector's cost of production is covered if prices drop too low. This program does not cost the government anything if market prices rise above the cost of production. The program, however, is being dropped due to a lack of federal funding.

---

[24] From a package distributed by OFVGA, October 5, 2009. See, in particular, 2007. "Strategies for the Horticultural Industry to Mitigate the Impact of Increases to Provincial Minimum Wage."

The current programs available to farmers of fruit, vegetables, and meats, however, are not structured to work over periods of long-term decline. Instead, after two years of drawing on the federally delivered *AgriInvest* and *AgriStability* programs, farmers receive less support. These programs are designed for short-term crises, not the long-term decline that producers of fruit, vegetables, and meats are experiencing. Nor do current programs provide incentives to protect farmland, enhance environmental farming practices, or develop local market linkages. One Ontario farmer explained the problem in this way:

> We've become very efficient at looking after supply-management growers and the grains and oilseeds sector. You can grow corn and soy and know that you'll be fine. People growing fruit and vegetables don't have any protection. There is a disincentive to grow this food. The fastest-growing segment of the food sector is the market for ecological, local, and organic food. Every day more farmers are growing more corn and soy. The programs are all wrong. We need risk management for people growing fruit, vegetables, and meat for regional markets. Currently, it is a massive risk to grow this food. If you want to tap into the local, organic market, you are on your own. The fastest-growing market is underserviced by these programs. Therefore the growth is unsatisfied. [25]

Bridging the Gap

A new generation of risk management programs that reflect the changing context for Ontario farmers needs to be negotiated between the provincial and the federal government. Many current programs underwrite unsustainable farming practices, and do not provide adequate support to farmers. Farmers need to be ensured a floor price for their product — in effect crop insurance. At the same time, farm practices should result in the policy outcomes we want as a society. These include farmland protection, sustainable ecological farm practices, resilient rural communities, and strong rural-to-urban linkages through local markets.

The Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition brings together several farm sectors (horticulture, beef, pork, grains, and oilseeds) to advocate for a new generation of risk management programs. They call for these programs to be modelled after the grains and oilseeds sector pilot, and for the reinstatement of the *Net Income Stabilization Account (NISA)* program. These important programs must be developed in partnership with both farmers and consumers.

The implementation of multifunctional credits could also be part of this new-generation risk management program. Incentives should be provided to promote sustainable farming practices and farm diversification. The programs should be designed to favour local markets over export markets. The organic and

[25] Personal communication, Bryan Gilvesy, February 2010.

diversified farm sector must be included in the negotiations for these changes, as current programs and proposals do not recognize the production practices of this sector. As one industry consultant noted, "Programs need to take a whole farm approach. We need to promote diversity, sustainability, and long-term planning on Ontario farms."[26]

Additional supports are also needed. For example, famers would also benefit from tax policy reform to reduce the portion they have to pay for the health care levy or workers' compensation levies. Changes to municipal tax assessment could support and encourage farmers to carry out processing on farms. At present, farmers risk having their properties reclassified as commercial or industrial land uses if they carry out processing on more than a minimal scale; commercial/industrial land is subject to a higher tax rate than agricultural land.

Another opportunity lies in tying local food production to public health goals. Programs such as the provincially supported *Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program*[27] positively impact both farmers and students in remote regions, and could be scaled across the province.

A longer-term strategy would include mechanisms for enhancing returns from the marketplace. Investments in promotional initiatives such as *Foodland Ontario* and *Pick Ontario Freshness* need to be increased. Research is also needed to identify the factors that convert consumers from a "propensity" to buy Ontario to more committed buying. The *Vintners' Quality Assurance (VQA)* experience in the wine-making sector provides a model for this change, whereby a heavy investment in market assessment and research led to an understanding of how the sector could be developed.

At the same time, farmers need support for commercialization and product development. Developing regional storage, processing, and distribution infrastructure could result in a more equitable share of the food dollar going to farmers. Capital grants and loan programs could also help build the infrastructure necessary for delivering food from farm to table through a system focused on enhanced product quality, improved product handling, and value-added products.

This kind of research and infrastructure development could promote sustainable and ecological farm practices, and make value chains more equitable for farmers, as could initiatives that tie local food production to public health.

---

[26] Personal communication, Elbert van Donkersgoed, March 2010.
[27] Public Health Research, Education and Development Program 2007.

Idea 2. Make Room for New Farmers and Alternative Markets within the Supply-Managed System[28]

Ontario is losing farmers, and there are not many new farmers interested in entering agriculture. Over the past five years, a number of new farmer training programs have been launched. Organizations such as the FarmOn Alliance, FarmStart, the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training, and Farmers Growing Farmers coordinate internship and training opportunities across the province. Through this work, a number of trends and barriers related to new farmers have been documented.

There are four categories of potential new farmers. The first is young farmers who come from farming backgrounds. The second is young farmers from non-farm backgrounds. The third is new immigrant farmers whose considerable farming experience in their home countries needs to be adapted to the Ontario context. The fourth is professionals who are entering farming as a second or third career. Many of these farmers are supplying consumers interested in alternatives that allow them to feel more of a connection with the farmer who produced the food. This reflects a growing demand for differentiated products. However, the regulatory and business climates in which food is produced in Canada do not always allow for differentiation to occur, especially among supply-managed products.

Where Is the Gap?

It is widely recognized that farming provides a number of benefits to society, including rural economic development, community health, food access, cultural integration (of new immigrant farmers), and land stewardship. Yet the number of farmers across the province is declining, and new farmers encounter considerable challenges as they try to establish their farm enterprises.

The demand for differentiated products provides a market for new farmers, and yet it is hindered by supply management — a system that works well for conventional producers of the supply-managed foods, but does not work well for those who engage in non-conventional forms of farming.

---

[28] Advisor: Christie Young, FarmStart. See also "New Farmers and Alternative Markets Within the Supply-Managed System," a Food Solutions paper published by the Metcalf Foundation in June 2010.

The gap lies between new farmers' interest in farm and food enterprises, and the challenges to entering farming or supplying food to alternative markets. This results in declining numbers of farms and lost economic opportunities.

The Bridge

The supply-management system for foods such as eggs, milk, and poultry was created in the 1960s. Supply-management organizations, under such names as the Ontario Milk Marketing Board or the Egg Farmers of Ontario, act as intermediaries between the producers of milk or eggs, and the processors or retailers who package, use, or sell those foods. They ensure that the farmers receive a set price for their products, and they carry out general marketing campaigns for each type of food. They also regulate the supply of milk, eggs, or poultry by setting quotas on the amount of each type of food that farmers may produce. Regulating supply is a way of controlling the price of each food.

Supply management works well for conventional producers of these foods. Most of these are farmers who specialize in one single kind of farming (dairy, poultry, or eggs) and do it on a large scale. Farmers producing the same kinds of food know they will all receive the same price for it, they do not have to worry about finding customers, and they do not have to carry out their own individual marketing campaigns.

Supply management does not, however, work well for those who engage in non-conventional forms of farming. These include organic farmers, farmers who do their own on-farm processing, or farmers who carry out mixed farming (raising some livestock and growing some crops or vegetables). These farmers are not producing predictable amounts of a predictable commodity. Their business depends on their ability to differentiate themselves in the market, and they do their own marketing to let customers know about what they do differently. They do not benefit from economies of scale, but their diversification protects them from a downturn in one particular area — the failure of a particular crop or a disease that affects one type of animal, for instance. Many of them also sell their products through alternative outlets, such as farmers' markets, farm shops, or Community Shared Agriculture (CSA).

Problems arise when non-conventional farmers want to sell their organic milk, free-range eggs, or rare-breed chickens to customers and become subject to the same rules as conventional producers. They are not in a position to benefit from the supply-management organization's services, since they do not want their products pooled with those of others, and they carry out their own marketing. Yet they must still observe quota regulations.

The production of chickens or eggs on a very small scale may be exempt from the quotas, but there are no exemptions for milk. And even in the case of eggs and chickens, there is a large gap between the upper level of production allowed

under the exemption and the minimal level of production subject to a quota (for example, a farmer who raises fewer than 300 broiler chickens a year is exempt, but above that level, the minimum number of chickens that can be raised under the quota system is 14,000). Moreover, farmers have to buy the right to produce a certain quota amount of a certain product. This cost is a barrier to new farmers.

Similarly, artisanal food producers across the province are not able to readily purchase milk from specific farms to make cheese. Nor are they supported to establish small-scale food companies that showcase and promote Ontario's unique agricultural products. This limits Ontario's ability to develop regional culinary products.

Bridging the Gap

The first step in resolving these issues is to recognize the differences between the needs of new producers supplying alternative products and those of producers supplying commodity products. Supply management markets commodities through a single channel and targets relatively homogeneous farms supplying homogenous commodities, while new producers struggle with barriers to entry into a market in which they want to operate at a relatively small scale and do their own marketing.

Discussions need to begin that engage the supply-management organizations, public policy makers, and new alternative producers on how to encourage innovation and production within supply managed commodities, while retaining the supply management system for those who need it. Some of the options available for new producers would include:

- increasing quota exemptions
- developing alternative markets that are not subject to quotas
- decreasing minimum quota levels
- establishing separate quotas for specialty products
- offering exemptions for specialty products
- offering exemptions for producers who sell through direct marketing
- setting aside a certain amount of processing capacity for alternative producers

Idea 3. Harvest the Whole Value of Ecological Services from Agriculture[29]

Farmers and ranchers together constitute the largest group of environmental stewards in the world. By managing their land sustainably, they can offer ecological services (also known as ecosystem services) such as clean water, fertile soil, support for biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. Farmers and farming also offer economic benefits to the local economy that include agri-tourism, the preservation of cultural landscapes, and recreational opportunities.

Where Is the Gap?

What prevents farmers from fulfilling their roles as environmental stewards is largely the lack of incentives and a market system that does not at present reward them for providing ecosystem services.

A recent report by the David Suzuki Foundation for the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation[30] estimated the non-market value of the ecosystem services represented by the protected land on the Greenbelt at $329 million. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is leading efforts to measure environmental services through the *National Agri-Environmental Health Analysis and Reporting Program* as well as through a *National Carbon and Greenhouse Gas Accounting and Verification System*. The goal is to monitor and report on greenhouse gas emissions and changes in soil carbon stock for Canada, as a contribution to Canada's commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

At the provincial level, the *Ontario Climate Change Action Plan* states, "Ontario will work with its agricultural partners in developing, initiating and verifying carbon offset initiatives to encourage their inclusion in carbon trading systems under discussion. These initiatives could reward farmers, private landowners or First Nations who manage their lands to capture and store carbon. Their work will provide important co-benefits such as increasing conservation lands, improving habitat, and preserving wetlands, reducing waste, and improving water quality."[31] Nonetheless, a gap remains between these commitments and the implementation of large-scale programs to realize the ecological benefits of farming.

---

[29] Advisor: Bryan Gilvesy, YU Ranch and Norfolk *ALUS* Pilot.
[30] David Suzuki Foundation 2008.
[31] Ontario Ministry of the Environment 2007, 26.

The Bridge

Programs exist that could close the gap by compensating farmers for ecological services. For example, a program in England, called *Natural England*, compensates farmers and other land stewards for effective environmental stewardship of their land. This program pays out the equivalent of more than $1 billion a year to land stewards who conserve wildlife and biodiversity, protect landscape character and quality, conserve natural and genetic resources, and carry out flood management.

In Canada, the province of Prince Edward Island sponsors a program called *Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)*. The program pays farmers for carrying out activities such as planting trees for buffer zones, retiring sensitive land from cultivation, building fences to keep livestock away from watercourses, and practising farming in a way that conserves land and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

ALUS exists in Ontario, but it is still only at the pilot project stage, with 55 farm families in Norfolk County enrolled. The community-run pilot began in 2008 and is due to continue until 2012. It has already demonstrated carbon sequestration benefits through the planting of Carolinian forest, oak savannah, pollinator habitat, native Ontario tall grass prairie land cover, and buffer strips along watercourses. So far this pilot project has converted 456 acres of marginal farmed land to sustainable land-management practices, with a budget of less than $1 million and a part-time coordinator.

Bridging the Gap

Implementing a province-wide ecological goods and services program in Ontario would close the gap between farmers and their role as environmental stewards.

The first step is to fund additional pilot projects across the province. Environmental stewardship takes different forms in different areas with different landscapes, micro-climates, and different species. Restoration ecotypes that work well in Norfolk County are not necessarily the same projects that will be appropriate in Niagara or Quinte. Additional pilots would test the transferability of the community-based *ALUS* approach on different landscapes.

At the same time, quantification protocols to measure the carbon sequestration benefits of ecological goods and services projects are needed. Work must also continue on development of a third-party verification process that is able to certify the amount of carbon sequestered and the additional ecological co-benefits created by ecological goods and services projects. These programs would then be in a position to sell Ontario Ecological Credits — scientifically proven, third-party-verified offset credits that are sustainable and provide ecosystem resilience.

Development of these systems will require investment from both the public and private sector. The provincial government can participate by funding basic ecological goods and services programs from the income generated from carbon allowances and ensuring the public interest is served. Ontario Ecological Credits from ecological goods and services projects would enable private-sector investors to support "made in Ontario" sustainable climate-change solutions with their carbon-offset dollars. These parallel paths will engage farmers as climate change solution providers and reap the full package of goods that flow from farmed land.

Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan sets out lofty goals for climate change solutions, climate change adaptation, and ecosystem resilience. By providing leadership and funding more ecological goods and services pilots and development of the Ecological Credits program, the province can make a significant first step towards province-wide engagement of the agricultural community through ecological goods and services by 2012.

Idea 4: Plant Urban Ontario[32]

Urban agriculture in Ontario's cities is largely confined to gardening in backyards, in containers on rooftops, and in community gardens. Yet the potential exists to develop urban agriculture to the point at which it supplies a sizable proportion of a city's demand for fresh herbs and vegetables.

Where Is the Gap?

Contrary to what some city residents might think, the availability of land that could be cultivated in urban areas is not an insurmountable barrier to urban agriculture. One study in Toronto estimated that it would take 2,317 hectares to grow 10% of the fresh vegetables that city's dwellers eat.[33] This land can be found on existing farms within city limits, in industrial areas, within hydro corridors, on the grounds of large institutions, on rooftops, and in small plots dotted throughout cities.

The gap between this potential and the current reality lies partly in the outdated idea that farming is what happens in the country — an idea that is reflected in government structures and taxation systems. The fact that Ontario has a Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs clearly links agriculture to non-urban areas: agriculture simply doesn't fit in with current notions of urbanity. This gap also becomes evident in the thinking of those who oppose the establishment of community gardens or the planting of fruit trees in city parks. Agriculture contradicts some city dwellers' notions of what urban areas should look like.

Another gap lies in the area of infrastructure for packaging, processing, and distributing food from urban farmers. Currently, there are no established supply chains linking urban growers and urban eaters.

Finally, there are gaps separating various groups who want to grow food in the city, and a need to connect efforts scattered here and there, across cities and across the province. Scaling up urban agriculture will require sharing — knowledge, expertise, tools, land, and other resources.

The Bridge

At the 2010 *Bring Food Home* conference, a provincial urban agriculture working group was formed to share resources and tools to support urban

---

[32] Advisors: Joseph Nasr, Rod MacRae and James Kuhns. See also "Scaling Up Urban Agriculture in Toronto: Building the Infrastructure." A Food Solutions paper published by the Metcalf Foundation in June 2010.

[33] MacRae et al. 2010.

agriculture activities across the province. The recently formed Toronto Urban Growers network is working to bring together urban farmers to share best practices. More groups like this are needed throughout Ontario to lobby for changes to official plans, zoning bylaws, tax codes, and other outdated structures that limit the extent of urban agriculture in cities, and to encourage foundations and institutions to support efforts to grow more food in cities.

In a survey of members of Toronto Urban Growers, the idea of neighbourhood hubs for urban agriculture emerged, that is, support facilities for food production. These facilities could offer areas for washing and preparing produce, canning stations and canning supplies, dehydrators, and tool-lending facilities, as well as meeting spaces, experts who could provide advice on technical matters, educational workshops, and a library. The respondents to the survey stressed that knowledge and facilities for processing the harvest are as important as help for the production process itself.

Bridging the Gap

Scaling up urban agriculture means two things. First, it means spreading simple growing approaches throughout cities, involving more people in more places. Second, it means enhancing the sophistication and productivity of urban agriculture practices, that is, the development of commercial-scale agriculture capable of becoming part of the mainstream food-supply system.

For the first kind of agriculture, the key requirements are support from municipalities and from non-profit groups. Spaces should be made available for cultivation and processing on city-owned and institutional land. Neighbourhood hubs would foster collective efforts to grow more food. Community programs could include education on urban agriculture methods, and support for those who are new to gardening and growing.

The second kind of agriculture, which operates at the commercial level, also needs municipal recognition, since the spaces involved may be larger. Changes to the official plans and zoning bylaws would ensure that agriculture is recognized as an urban land use. Medium- and large-scale operations will need financial support in their start-up phase as well as links to processors, distributors, retailers, and markets. The main sales opportunities include urban farm stands, farmers' markets, Good Food Markets, produce auctions, mobile produce carts, home-delivery box schemes, and Community Shared Agriculture.

At present, some cities across the province (for example, Toronto and Waterloo), generally support urban agriculture, although they have no specific urban agriculture programs. Some growers do, however, benefit from programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or increase food security. One important and symbolic move might be to set aside some municipal land for "edible landscaping."

Idea 5: Implement a School Food Program, and Embed Food Literacy in the Curriculum[34]

"When children go to school hungry or poorly nourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration and behaviour are all negatively impacted. . . . As a result of being hungry at school, these children may not reach their full developmental potential — an outcome that can have a health impact throughout their entire lives."

— 2008 Report on the State of Public Health in Canada[35]

In Ontario, one in every nine children lives in poverty. Meanwhile, rates of diabetes and obesity are increasing among Ontario's children. The serious consequences of these trends for children's health and educational outcomes are foreseeable, and the effects of those outcomes on Ontario's health care costs and future economy can also be predicted. These problems could be alleviated with school food programs that ensure that children have both the nutrition and food literacy they need to focus on their studies today and to ensure their health in the future.

Where Is the Gap?

Canada is the only nation in the former G8 that has no universal student nutrition policy and no federal funding for student nutrition programs. Health Canada sets nationwide standards for the safety and nutritional quality of food sold in this country, and these standards are enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. But because agriculture and education are mainly provincial responsibilities under the Canadian constitution, federal policies do not directly address school food or the use of local food in schools.

Ontario's Ministry of Health Promotion drew up an *Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living*[36] in 2006, which stressed the need to improve access to healthy foods for young people. But the money allocated to support this action plan is inadequate — particularly since food costs rose 17% in 2009.

As a result, there is a patchwork of different programs cobbled together by different groups in an attempt to fill the gap between poor student nutrition and access to healthy food. Some jurisdictions do better than others at feeding schoolchildren.

---

[34] Advisors: Debbie Field, Lori Nikkel, and Meredith Hayes (FoodShare), Valerie Ward (consultant).
[35] Public Health Agency of Canada 2008
[36] Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion 2006.

The Bridge

Canada can look to the United States for school food program models. The United States passed a *National School Lunch Act* in 1946, which today provides meals to more than 30 million students, whose parents pay according to their family income. There is also the *Child Nutrition Act*, which governs the *National School Breakfast Program*. Although these programs set only minimum standards and could be improved to promote greater use of healthy, sustainably grown food, they do ensure that children at least have access to food at school.

Meanwhile, the American National Farm to School Network, supported by a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, runs more than 2,000 programs in 40 states, encouraging more direct connections between farms and schools. These programs are paying off: a survey by the School Nutrition Association found that 34% of U.S. schools are using at least some locally sourced foods, and another 22% are investigating doing so.[37] Programs like this could be extended to Canada.

Current funding and programs for student nutrition in Ontario offer a model for scaling up across the province.

In Ontario $17 million is provided annually through the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services[38] to support healthy eating in schools. In 2008 Ontario allocated funding to support 1,013 new student nutrition programs with a focus on fresh fruits and vegetables through 19 regional agencies and over 40 partnerships that include representation from municipalities, health units, school boards, community groups, family foundations, businesses, and non-profits.

In Toronto, for example, the Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition unifies Toronto Public Health, the school boards, the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, the Angel Foundation, and community groups, facilitating more than 800 student nutrition programs that provide a healthy snack, breakfast, morning meal, or lunch to more than 125,000 children a day.

Through FoodShare Toronto, a fresh produce program allows more than 224 of these 800 student nutrition programs to purchase the freshest produce at wholesale prices, directly from local farmers when possible. FoodShare's *Field to Table* school program teaches children about healthy eating options as well as the local food system by inviting local farmers to visit classrooms and in turn arranging for classes to visit the farms.

In Ottawa, by contrast, all food decisions are centralized and dining services are contracted out to an international food service company. Moreover,

---

[37] Anderson, J. 2009. "Nationwide there's a small movement to get local produce onto school lunch trays." *Southwest Iowa News*, October 18. www.farmtoschool.org/state-medias.php?id=11 (date accessed: February 18, 2010)

[38] See http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/schoolsnacks/faq.aspx

according to sources in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, there is a perception that local sourcing would contravene government trade and purchasing regulations. The perception is not accurate, but it represents a gap between school food procurement and local food.

Bridging the Gap

First, the Province of Ontario needs a single, integrated school food policy, above and beyond the new *Ministry of Education School Food Beverage Policy* to be implemented in September 2011, which outlines the types of food that can be sold in schools.[39] This policy should sit with a single provincial ministry, to replace the current patchwork overseen by a variety of government ministries and agencies. It should ensure that all children have access to healthy, nutritious food at school, in breakfast, snack, or lunch programs.

Second, to support the use of locally grown foods, the Province needs to clarify the trade regulations to ensure that those with institutional procurement responsibilities understand that they can give preference to local suppliers. This could be achieved through a strong policy statement encouraging local food procurement. (The gap between the needs of institutional buyers for multi-year, large-volume food supplies and the ability of local suppliers to meet those needs is dealt with in Idea 8 of this report.)

Finally, government programs and policies will not, in themselves, ensure healthy eating habits among school students. The curriculum itself should support healthy food choices as well as teach children the skills needed to grow and cook food. Food literacy curriculum and teaching tools should be developed by the Ministry or community experts, drawing on resources such as school gardens and community kitchens, and should include parents and families as well as students. There are a number of models that could be followed, such as EcoSource in Peel Region, or *Growing Up Organic* in Ottawa. In 2010 FoodShare Toronto launched the *Recipe for Change* campaign aimed at ensuring that all students in Ontario learn healthy eating skills, as well as how to cook, grow food, and compost.

[39] Ministry of Education 2010.

Idea 6: Support Community Food Centres[40]

Food insecurity is a condition in which people lack the food needed to provide them with the energy and nutrients to live an active and healthy life. Poverty is one of the main reasons why people experience food insecurity. According to the *Canadian Community Health Survey*, 379,100 households (about 9%) in Ontario in 2004 were food-insecure, and the prevalence of food insecurity was higher (about 11%) in households with children.[41]

As a household expense, food is a flexible budget item, whereas the costs of other necessities (e.g., housing, heat, electricity, etc.) are less negotiable. As a result, many households rely on in-kind food charities, such as food banks, to make up the income shortfall, or consume cheaper processed food — which may lead to poor health and obesity — to avoid the most acute forms of hunger.

Where Is the Gap?

Many local food initiatives, such as farmers' markets and Community Shared Agriculture projects, have inadequately addressed questions of social justice. They offer healthy food to those who can afford it but may not reach those who need it most desperately. Yet the mainstream food system also fails to provide fresh, healthy foods to people in many low-income communities; grocery-store and supermarket chains that sell fresh food will not locate in these areas — which become known as "food deserts."

The gap is thus between those who produce fresh food and those who cannot obtain it easily — or, even if they can, do not know how to prepare a meal with it.

The Bridge

Community food centres, such as The Stop in west-central Toronto, work at a number of levels to fill this gap. They provide emergency food supplies through a food bank, a function they share with a range of community service providers and charitable groups. The Stop also offers healthy and delicious cooked meals to the people who use its services,demonstrating by example that fresh food choices do not mean sacrificing taste and enjoyment.

However, The Stop goes beyond the mere provision of food and offers a range of programs to teach people healthy eating habits as well as cooking and

---

[40] Advisors: Kathryn Scharf, Charles Levkoe, and Nick Saul, The Stop Community Food Centre. See also "In Every Community A Place for Food: The Role of the Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable and Just Food System," a Food Solutions paper published by the Metcalf Foundation in June 2010.

[41] Statistics Canada 2004.

gardening skills. Recently, the organization launched the Green Barn on the site of the rehabilitated Wychwood streetcar barns in Toronto, a place where participants can get hands-on experience in urban agriculture.

As participants become more involved with The Stop, they can take other courses to help them advance social justice in their communities through volunteering, public speaking, and advocacy.

The Stop organizes its work around a series of principles that start with the straightforward approach ("Meet people's immediate needs, and meet them where they are") and lead up to broader goals ("Work to remake the food system"). By working at all levels, the organization has gained recognition for its ability to bring together local food and social justice.

Bridging the Gap

The Stop's successes have led to requests from various organizations to provide guidance in developing other community food centres that take a similar approach, while respecting the unique context of communities that may have different needs and priorities from those in central Toronto.

Because it provides a physical space for neighbourhood residents to meet, get to know each other, and become engaged in their community, a community food centre is the ideal expression of a community hub that uses food to bring people together. Community food centres are most needed in areas with low-income communities requiring services. At the same time, they can involve people from across the socio-economic spectrum as financial supporters, as volunteers, and as participants in advocacy or in non-subsidized programs, such as food literacy programs or farmers' markets. Community food centres can involve everyone in the quest for a local, sustainable, and just food system.

Research conducted at The Stop and with other food-based community organizations in the Greater Toronto Area, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, London, and Sudbury confirmed that the determination to take a comprehensive approach to addressing food insecurity is widespread, and that concrete resources are needed to make progress towards that goal.

This research has led to the development of a proposal for a series of pilot projects for additional community food centre hubs, to be developed over three years. The pilots would require both public and private funding sources as well as partnerships and alliances with provincial ministries and within the academic community. The consultations also elicited interest from private-sector foundations. It seems that the time is right to connect Ontario's local, healthy food sector with those whose health is threatened by poverty and inequitable access to good food.

Idea 7: Establish Local Food Infrastructure through Regional Food Clusters[42]

Across Ontario, facilities for food processing have either reduced in size or closed, including the only facility that processed frozen organic vegetables. Farmers' options for value-added processing have become extremely limited. At the same time as the closures of small and medium-sized food processing facilities have occurred, there has been growing demand for local food from consumers who are concerned about the provenance and safety of their food. Consumers cannot find the local products they seek; farmers have lost processing facilities for some of the local ingredients they produce; abattoirs are disappearing. A review of the entire supply chain reveals a chaotic landscape of piecemeal solutions and missed opportunities.

A sustainable regional food economy in Ontario cannot exist without appropriately scaled food processing. Ontario can boast of highly experienced and knowledgeable farmers, excellent agricultural land, and a population increasingly committed to regional food markets. Between production and consumption however, the collapse of regional food processing has left a hole where opportunity drains away. Farmers need food processing that is flexible, can be subject to regional and sustainable labelling and certification regulations, and can use marketing strategies to build regional food economies rather than export and transnational economies. This middle must be rebuilt through the concerted effort at every level and aspect of the food economy, from policy to legislation to marketing to agricultural training and support.

Where Is the Gap?

Ontario's structural, legislative, economic and regulatory frameworks have led to a food processing infrastructure that is inadequate for many small- and medium-scale farmers.

Research identifies the need to shift scale and methods in order to fully benefit from diverse food-processing opportunities in Ontario. This means moving from large-scale, centralized food processing towards smaller-scale, more flexible, regionally based processing. Regional food clusters have been identified throughout North America as a way to facilitate local food systems. A flexible, regionally based food economy could reduce economic inefficiencies,

[42] Advisors: Sally Miller (West End Food Co-op) and Maureen Carter-Whitney (Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy). See also "Nurturing Fruit and Vegetable Processing in Ontario," a Food Solutions paper published by the Metcalf Foundation in June 2010.

environmental pollution and waste, create more jobs and community capacity, and retain the positive benefits of economic activity in Ontario's communities.

A simple shift in technologies, or the installation of a new facility that builds on whatever infrastructure exists, may not be sufficient for a strong regional food sector. Many experts are beginning to advocate a broader solution that would see regional food clusters created across the province. This vision requires not only a new model but a shift in goals and values, away from the dependence on centralization and consolidation and towards scale-appropriate, sustainable enterprises that are close to markets, geared to regional production volumes or potential, and built with local labour and expertise.

A gap exists between the supply of local fruits, vegetables, and meat, and scale-appropriate and regionally based processing capacity.

The Bridge

Several groups in Ontario (Foodlink in Waterloo, Food Down the Road in Kingston) are working to create regionally based food production and distribution systems. Regional food clusters were enthusiastically evoked at the 2009 *Building the Infrastructure for Local Food* conference in Ontario. Donald and others refer to this possibility as a different way of thinking about the problem — a paradigm shift. "The new 'Craft' economy has profound implications for sustainable economic development as place and [provenance] become central to quality food making, marketing and lifestyle."[43] She distinguishes the new "Craft" economy from the standard model that emphasizes centralization, consolidation, and globalization (the "Kraft" economy).

Numerous barriers obstruct this shift. These include difficulties in mobilizing capital for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); a lack of communication networks among potential allies and actors; tax, legislative, and regulatory regimes that tend to be responsive to large-scale centralized models of food production; a lack of basic development resources and training geared to SMEs; and an inadequate system of appropriate-scale distribution and storage facilities.

However, there are opportunities for policy-makers, legislators, and actors at every level of the food industry to consider effective methods of catalyzing this promising sector — the SMEs that are crucial to regional food clusters, and constitute more than 50% of Ontario food processing activity, despite the barriers.

---

[43] Donald 2009.

Bridging the Gap

Recommendations to stimulate regionally structured food processing include establishing and expanding knowledge networks for producers (through farmer organizations, clubs, and extension programs), as well as establishing an alliance of small- and medium-sized food processors.

Regional food clusters can be encouraged through targeted investment, favourable legislation, regulations, research, and policy development. Strengthened co-operative legislation could support the development of co-operative models for food processing. Scale-appropriate food safety regulations and support for compliance by small- and medium-scale processors is necessary.

Market research and marketing strategies must be geared towards the promotion of regional food production and processing in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector.

Idea 8: Expand Public Procurement of Local, Sustainably Produced Food[44]

Governments at all levels, particularly in Europe and the United States, are using sustainable food procurement policies to build healthier, more economically viable food and farming systems. Through such purchasing criteria, and through measures such as standards and labelling, sustainable food procurement policies are positively influencing local food production, distribution, and consumption.[45]

The Ontario government spends more than $10 billion every year on goods and services. Although Ontario's central procurement office does not mention food, in 2009 Ontario committed $24 million over three years to explore a local food procurement policy and to bring more Ontario food into public schools, hospitals, and other public institutions.[46] A sustainable food procurement policy is greatly needed in order to expand the supply and demand for locally produced food.

Where Is the Gap?

Canada has signed two international trade agreements which affect government procurement — the World Trade Organization *Agreement on Government Procurement*, and the *North American Free Trade Agreement*, known as *NAFTA*. Neither applies to institutional procurement in Ontario. However, the province is subject — along with other provinces and the federal government — to the 1995 *Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT)*. The *AIT* stipulates that all Canadian suppliers have the right to bid on public-sector contracts over a certain value.[47] In addition, contracts in Ontario must adhere to the provincial *Discriminatory Business Practices Act*, R.S.O. 1990, which

---

[44] Advisor: Lori Stahlbrand (Local Food Plus).
[45] Morgan and Sonnino 2008.
[46] Public Works and Government Services Canada. "Policy on Green Procurement." http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ecologisation-greening/achats-procurement/politique-policy-eng.html (date accessed: April 7, 2010). Ontario's Supply Management Services and the Ontario Public Service Green Office recommended a local food procurement policy in 2007. See "Report to the Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs: Minister's Strategic Advisory Committee (MSAC). February 6th, 2007." http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/msacreport.htm. See also 2009 news release "More Ontario-Grown Food in Schools, Hospitals." http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/event.php?ItemID=5360&Lang=En and Sustain Ontario's response to the announcement http://sustainontario.com/initiatives/policy.
[47] The Canadian American Strategy Review.

prohibits granting preference to suppliers based on a variety of factors, including geographic location.[48]

Some purchasers mistakenly interpret these regulations to mean that local procurement is not permitted. For example, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board purchasing coordinator stated that granting preference to local suppliers is prohibited under the *Discriminatory Business Practices Act*.[49] Yet both the University of Toronto and the Town of Markham have integrated local foods into their food service operations. According to experts, both the *Discriminatory Business Practices Act* and the *AIT* are broad enough to give institutions the scope they need to source more food locally. "It's a matter of institutions wording their Requests for Proposal in ways that allow them to accomplish what they want without being discriminatory," explains Chris Alward, director of market development at Local Food Plus (LFP). Local supply chains can be supported and leveraged by public-sector procurement.

The Bridge

Local Food Plus is a non-profit organization founded in 2005 to strengthen regional food economies by certifying local farmers and processors who carry out sustainable food production, and connecting them with buyers. LFP has developed standards for production, labour, native habitat preservation, animal welfare, and on-farm energy use. Its third-party inspectors certify food based on a points system that encourages individual improvement. LFP helps institutional food service providers source LFP products and meet local food targets.[50]

In June 2009, the Town of Markham became the first municipality in Canada to adopt a local and sustainable food procurement policy, in partnership with LFP.[51] The agreement commits Markham to using a minimum of 10% LFP-certified products from local farmers in the first year (which ended in September 2009) and increasing by 5% every year until the agreement ends in 2013. The program extends to municipal food services, including supplies to civic, recreation, and community centres.

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) launched its *Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI)* in 2003. The initial focus of the *PSFPI* was on creating public-sector markets for local food. But in 2007 its objectives were expanded to include promoting food safety, health, and nutrition; encouraging tenders from small businesses; and ensuring more sustainable, efficient supply chains and procurement. The *PSFPI* is supported by policies such as the *Sustainable*

---

[48] *Discriminatory Business Practices Act*, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter D.12. www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/.../elaws/statutes...90d12_e.htm (date accessed: April 7, 2010).
[49] Ward 2009.
[50] See www.localfoodplus.ca
[51] Town of Markham 2008.

Farming and Food Strategy and the *Sustainable Procurement National Action Plan*. DEFRA promotes the *PSFPI* by encouraging cross-governmental procurement collaboration; offering support for suppliers and purchasers (including conferences, workshops, and a website with toolkits and case studies); and sponsoring regional pilots and projects to develop food-supply chains.[52] Results of the *PSFPI* include a significant rise in public procurement of healthy, seasonal U.K. food and more tenders from small and local producers. Challenges include unclear objectives and evaluation measures, supply-side constraints, lack of clarity around who owns and delivers the procurement policy, and ongoing preference for low-cost versus sustainably grown food.

Bridging the Gap

A procurement policy suited to Ontario's context would be shaped by international and interprovincial trade regulations, as well as Ontario's political culture, public institutions, food culture, and food and farming systems. It would also require the development of a strong Ontario supply chain. The policy should support existing sustainable supply chains through, for example, infrastructure development, labelling, education, sustainable food standards, and certification.

One of the prerequisites for sustainable procurement is strong leadership. The lack of organizational and political leadership has been identified as a common barrier to creating and implementing food procurement policies.[53] Another prerequisite is a clear definition of what constitutes local, sustainably grown food.[54] The government should continue with the Foodland Ontario label and "facilitate voluntary labelling and certification initiatives undertaken by farmers' organizations and other stakeholders, and consider other ways to improve the labelling of local food to allow buyers to verify its authenticity."[55]

Given the Ontario climate and growing restrictions, the program would also require a database of the availability and seasonality of local food, as well as of existing local producers, processors, distributors, and others who could meet increased levels of demand.

Finally, the program creators would need to identify regulatory and institutional barriers to local food, audit how the existing supply chain works, and research what local producers could offer beyond their current range of products.

---

[52] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (U.K.) 2009.
[53] Morgan and Sonnino 2008.
[54] See www.localfoodplus.ca
[55] Carter-Whitney 2008.

Idea 9: Link Good Food with Good Health[56]

Healthy eating leads to better health. Poor diet is associated with health problems that include colorectal cancer, low-weight births, and heart disease. Up to 80% of heart attacks and strokes could be prevented through lifestyle changes and healthy eating practices.[57] If all Ontarians had access to a nourishing diet, the rates and costs of illness, hospitalization, and death associated with a poor diet would decrease.

Increasing access to healthy food requires linking food production and distribution to health promotion as a central public health strategy. If the food system and the health system are not linked, chronic diseases, obesity rates, and disparities in health will likely continue to rise.[58] If they are integrated, there is an opportunity to improve the health of our population and reduce health care costs while supporting the local farm and food sector.

Where Is the Gap?

Ontario's food system is designed largely to support productivity and economic efficiency. It is not designed around the principle of ensuring that people, especially people living on low incomes, women, children, and members of aboriginal communities, have access to a nutritious diet that would improve their health. There is also a gap between the need to address the social determinants of health,[59] disease-prevention strategy and health promotion, and the overriding focus of the health system on after-the-fact medical aid to people who are ill.

Ontario's Ministry of Health Promotion has identified inactive lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits as primary risk factors in chronic disease.[60] In 2006 the Ministry also introduced an *Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL)* that recognized low incomes as a barrier to healthy eating and acknowledged the need for a healthy public policy, especially directed at children and youth. The *Ontario Public Health Standards*, which guide all public health programs and services, clearly recognize the structural barriers to chronic disease prevention. The *Standards* state that healthy environments,

---

[56] Advisor: Katherine Pigott, Waterloo Region Public Health.
[58] Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion 2006.
[58] Secretariat for the Intersectoral Healthy Living Network 2005.
[59] The social determinants of health link health status to socio-economic issues such as employment, community, food, income, etc. See, for example, Graham 2004.
[60] Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion 2006.

healthy eating, and food skills all contribute to disease prevention.[61] The gap lies between the policy language and the outcomes of programs. The policy has not been adequately resourced, implemented, or translated into programs, and barriers to healthy eating and health promotion persist.

The Bridge

Healthy Public Policy (HPP) is "any policy that creates and encourages a context for health — which includes food, shelter, income, social inequality, economic stability, and resource sustainability."[62] Mentioned briefly in Ontario's *Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living*, HPP focuses on health determinants and shifts the focus of health care to promotion and multi-sectoral action involving the ministries, sectors, and populations affected.

Other jurisdictions are beginning to document the links between food consumption and the policy and environmental supports that result in improved nutrition. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States recently published the *State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables, 2009*. The report provides benchmarks for tracking changes in fruit and vegetable consumption through behavioural, policy, and environmental indicators. One of these indicators is food systems support. The report states:

> Food policy councils and related food committees or coalitions are an organized, multi-stakeholder organizations which typically attempt to support environmental and policy change that can support improved food environments for healthy eating. Their multi-stakeholder members attempt to work together on their designated area's food system issues in a coordinated fashion and support and advise citizens and governments in developing policies and programs to improve the regional, state, and/or local food system. These councils can aid community F&V [fruit and vegetable] access by encouraging improvement of retail stores, supporting farm to institute programs, and designing model procurement policies and practices for schools, work sites, and other community organizations.[63]

The Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada proposes two long-term strategies that would promote a food systems approach to public health.[64] First, address the root cause of food insecurity (poverty) through improvements to social safety net programs, ensuring that individuals and families have sufficient financial resources to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Second, take a leadership role in the development and implementation of a national food policy that addresses the food system from production to consumption and harmonizes agriculture and public health goals.

---

[61] Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care 2008.
[62] Toronto Food Policy Council 1997.
[63] United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009
[64] Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada 2007. http://www.foodshedproject.ca/pdf/CDPAC.pdf

Similarly, the Heart and Stroke Foundation's *Spark Together for Healthy Kids* campaign[65] aims to address childhood obesity by encouraging children to eat healthier foods and become more physically active. Its policy prioritization poll asks the public to vote online on key policy positions, such as healthy food subsidies for low-income families, subsidized healthy food products like the Good Food Box, and an increase in food and nutrition courses in schools and community programming.

Bridging the Gap

Cancer Care Ontario published a report in March 2010, "Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, and Healthy Weights Guideline for Public Health in Ontario," that outlines a process that could provide a roadmap for bridging the gap between progressive healthy public policy language and poor health outcomes. This process involves building a case for action linking food and health; identifying the contributing factors and point of intervention; defining the range of opportunities for action; evaluating potential interventions; and selecting a portfolio of policies, programs, and actions.[66]

The process needs to involve multiple government ministries (including the Ministries of Education; Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Health and Long-Term Care; Municipal Affairs; Health Promotion; Transportation; Economic Development; and Community and Social Services), as well as public health and community partners. The focus of this process would be to use a food-systems approach to identify policies and programs that increase demand for, access to, and consumption of healthy food.

Many points of intervention have already been identified in public health reports. The inter-ministerial, cross-sectoral process would focus on developing and resourcing an action plan.

---

[65] See http://www.heartandstroke.on.ca/site/c.pvI3IeNWJwE/b.5109503/k.3FCB/Spark_Together_For_Healthy_Kids.htm

[66] Cancer Care Ontario 2010.

Idea 10: Plan for the Future of Farming and Food[67]

Planners are paying increased attention to food systems. For example, food is the focus of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute's 2010 symposium. There are numerous reasons for this attention, including the recognition that planners must manage growth and sprawl and account for the land needed to feed Ontario's population in a post-oil economy, and a recognition that planning is a way to improve health and access to food.

The American Planning Association has identified seven food-planning policy goals, including support for sustainable food systems and for comprehensive food-planning processes at the community and regional levels.[68] This support is especially important in Ontario, where effective planning can help resolve tensions such as those between farmers and non-farming residents of rural areas. Planning policies and tools shape farming practices and food enterprises in Ontario, and must reflect changes in these sectors to support innovation.

Where Is the Gap?

Agricultural land is subject to a range of planning policies and priorities, some inconsistent or subject to changing political agendas. The Ontario *Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)* requires municipalities to identify and protect prime agricultural areas that are threatened by severances (for residential development) and urban growth.[69] Both the *PPS* and the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH)* contain policies to decrease development pressure on farmland, though both are criticized for being too broad and allowing too much room for interpretation. Ontario's *Greenbelt Plan* protects agricultural and natural heritage lands within its jurisdiction, though a swath of prime agricultural land between the GTA and the Greenbelt remains vulnerable to development.[70]

While many areas for growing food may be protected, the land is not necessarily accessible to farmers. Land ownership and rental agreements as well as zoning and taxation regulations restrict access and threaten the long-term

---

[67] Advisors: Nina-Marie Lister and the On the Farm Graduate Urban Planning Studio, Ryerson University, and Arthur Churchyard, Ontario Farmland Trust.
[68] American Planning Association 2007.
[69] Caldwell and Dodds-Weir 2009.
[70] Ontario Farmland Trust 2009.

viability of farmers in peri-urban and rural areas. Zoning and taxation also hinder on-farm processing and prevent the diversification needed to ensure a farm's survival. Finally, the structure of municipal finances, which depend on property taxes from urban development, pits urban growth against the protection of agricultural land.

Over time, the *PPS* has added measures to regulate incompatible uses and deal with nuisance and odour complaints. The *Farming and Food Production Protection Act* also contains provisions to deal with conflicts between farming and other land uses.[71] Minimum-distance separation requirements (written into regional and official plans) are intended to prevent land use conflicts, but may nevertheless prevent farms from expanding or relocating.[72]

A gap thus exists between planning policies and tools and the needs of the changing farm and food sector.

The Bridge

Ontario can learn from other jurisdictions that are building local, sustainable food systems through revised food policy and planning frameworks, supportive governance structures, and new planning tools.

For example, in 2007, the Illinois *Food, Farms and Jobs Act* was enacted to build a stronger state-wide local and organic food system. The Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force held consultations across the state and developed a set of recommendations, including the creation of a state Farmland Committee and a Local Food, Farms and Jobs Council to implement the recommendations. These bodies were set up in 2009. The Council supports state procurement of local food; facilitates the building of infrastructure for local food and markets; eliminates legal barriers to a local farm and food economy; facilitates the use of public lands for growing local food; and supports a new labelling program for local farm and food products.[73]

Another model for consideration comes from Waterloo Region, where a *Healthy Community Food System Plan* was prepared by Public Health and released in 2007 as part of the *Regional Growth Management Strategy*. The food-system plan, which includes a countryside line to contain sprawl and protect farmland, was the result of community consultations and focus groups with land-use planners and other stakeholders. Five priority actions were identified: facilitating farm-to-institution programs; marketing to promote local food; developing a local food label; determining the feasibility of mobile farmers' markets and incubator kitchens; and working with the Planning division to

---

[71] Turvey and Konyi 2009.
[72] Ryerson University Graduate Planning Studio. 2009. "Food and Farm Innovation in the Creative Age." Unpublished report.
[73] Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force 2009.

address agricultural policy issues. An additional recommendation for a food-system roundtable led to its launch in November 2007 as an 18-member networking and policy-making group. The roundtable will oversee implementation of the local food-systems plan.[74]

Bridging the Gap

The time is ripe for a coordinated planning approach to protecting and strengthening farms and food production in Ontario. The following recommendations are first steps and will require work from the Ontario Ministries of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Finance; and Transportation; as well as the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation, municipal governments, conservation authorities, and food and farming organizations and businesses.

Food-systems planning must engage rural, farm, and urban communities in plan-making and research to support an analysis of local and regional food systems.[75] Governance for food-systems planning should come from a provincial Food Policy and Planning Council, a provincial Farmland Committee, and Agricultural Advisory Committees in all municipalities.[76] These groups should give input into the 2010 PPS review.

An *Ontario Farm, Food, and Health Act* should be proposed and should include zoning and taxation provisions to allow for on-farm processing and to support regional food clusters (including processing, storage, packing, and distribution) to increase access to healthy food.[77] Such an act needs to be complemented by a food-planning guide for Ontario planners and amendments to planning legislation — including the *Planning Act*, the *PPS*, and the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* — to protect prime agricultural land.[78]

---

[74] Pigott and Miedema 2007.
[75] See for example, Pothukuchi 2005.
[76] For discussion of Agricultural Advisory Committees, see Ontario Farmland Trust 2009.
[77] Caldwell 2006.
[78] For specific recommendations, see Ontario Farmland Trust 2009.

Advancing Ontario's Good Food Ideas

This paper provides ten good food ideas for discussion, but there are many more circulating within the province. At the 2010 *Bring Food Home* conference that connected farm and food networks from across the province, several working groups were formed. Some represent good food ideas that are not fully captured above. For example, one working group is focusing on provincial diversity and inclusion to foster a farm and food system that reflects Ontario's rich cultural diversity. Participants also identified priorities that included the abattoir crisis, farmers' market vouchers, the needs of seasonal migrant farm workers, and outreach to regions and sectors that are currently underrepresented in food discussions, such as the far north, the eastern and western parts of Ontario, aboriginal communities, and immigrant communities. Sustain Ontario will work on these priorities and others as they emerge.

Nevertheless, the ten good food ideas suggest four categories of overlapping issues and priorities.

Prioritize the Local Food Economy

Over and over, Sustain Ontario's advisors have argued that a resilient, diverse local food economy can contribute to many of the needed changes mentioned in this paper. Current farm and food policies and programs either force some small and medium-sized farming and food enterprises to become (or be swallowed up by) larger and more intensive operations, or drive them out of business. Across the province, however, people are calling for regional farming and food systems.

Small and medium-sized farming and food enterprises are successfully experimenting with new business models based on equitable value chains. Co-operative growing, marketing, distribution, and processing models were also identified as opportunities to revitalize this sector. The concept of regional food clusters provides a new framework through which to deliver new farmer training, food enterprise development, investment, and local food infrastructure. Market research and assessment must support regional food production and processing.

Prioritizing the local food economy means shifting the focus of farm and food policies and programs away from capturing export markets and towards strengthening regional Ontario markets.

Establish Community Food Centres and School Food Programs to Promote Healthy Food Environments and Food Literacy

Neighbourhood or community food centres combat food insecurity by ensuring that healthy food is available, delivering programs to vulnerable populations, teaching food skills, providing urban agriculture training and resources, engaging the community, and advocating for policy change. Schools can also provide good food and teach food literacy. Both community food centres and school food programs can link local farming and food directly to public health. These activities must be supported, as they are essential to creating healthy food environments and addressing the rising rates of chronic disease across the province.

Reform Farm Programs, Policies, Regulations, and Tax Systems

Cutting across the ten good food ideas is a call for a scale-appropriate regulatory regime that supports small and medium-scale farming and food enterprises. Taxation, local food procurement policies, and favourable legislation are also needed to support these enterprises. Farm programs and support must meet the twin objectives of ensuring the viability of local farms and providing incentives for sustainable farming systems. How can we trigger these reforms? Several farm and food leaders have suggested an *Ontario Farm, Food, and Health Act* that would provide a new policy framework for regulatory and taxation reform that links local food to health.

Improve Food Systems Governance

How do we align farm and food policies with public health[79] to promote economic viability and health along the food chain? An overarching recommendation that surfaces in almost every good food idea is food-systems governance.

The farm and food policy-making environment in Ontario is complex. In order to address the issues identified in this paper, new ways of working are required. Farm and food leaders across the province have proposed the following recommendations related to food-systems governance:

Food-systems governance requires inter-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Food-systems governance should start at the regional level and feed into broader, provincial-level governance structures.

Issue-specific alliances, coalitions, and working groups will include and work with government to develop new policies and manage implementation.

What governance structures are suitable? Across Ontario, food policy councils, committees, working groups, and roundtables have been formed to work on

[79] Muller et al. 2009.

food-systems issues. The work of these groups must be formally recognized and supported by municipal and regional/county governments and by the province. Priorities, best practices, and lessons learned at the local and regional level should be shared through a provincial food policy council. The provincial food policy council should be cross-sectoral and include decision-makers from provincial and municipal governments. The provincial food policy council should have a clear mandate to make recommendations on food-systems issues and advise on their implementation.

Many of the good food ideas also require simultaneous attention from a number of ministries. In order to cross existing government silos, inter-ministerial committees should be formed related to specific issues — for example, school food programs, community food centres, ecological goods and services, regional food clusters, and developing a food-systems approach to public health policies and programs. These committees should consult with industry and civil society experts to develop appropriate policies.

Conclusion

Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario contributes to a broader public discussion across the province about broken food systems. The paper offers a survey of innovative solutions that are either being considered or implemented by farm and food leaders. The farm income crisis and health crisis are caused by a policy gap whereby the two crises are addressed separately. Bridging the gap requires policies and programs that reflect integrated thinking about health, sustainability, and economic vitality in the food system. New structures and incentives that reflect this integrated thinking will result in the policy outcomes Ontarians seek.

Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations

1. Support producers of locally consumed fruit, vegetables, and meats.
    - Develop a new generation of risk management programs for farmers of non-supply-managed products.
    - Link risk management programs to desirable policy outcomes such as farmland protection, sustainable farm practices, rural community development, and local market linkages.
    - Identify tax policy reforms that compensate farmers for rising labour costs and enable on-farm value-added activities.
    - Invest in local food promotional initiatives.
    - Conduct market assessment and research to further develop local food linkages.
    - Support local food infrastructure, commercialization, and product development through capital grants and loan programs.
2. Make room for new farmers and alternative markets within the supply-managed system.
    - Develop opportunities for new producers to supply alternative products within supply-managed commodity systems, while retaining the supply management system.
3. Harvest the whole value of ecological goods and services from agriculture.
    - Fund new agricultural goods and services pilot projects across the province.
    - Develop quantification protocols to measure the carbon sequestration benefits of on-farm ecological goods and services.
    - Create Ontario Ecological Credits from agricultural goods and services projects to enable private-sector investment.
4. Plant urban Ontario.
    - Make municipal and institutional urban space available for cultivation and processing.
    - Develop neighbourhood hubs to provide education, coordination, and services related to urban food production.
    - Change official plans and zoning bylaws to ensure agriculture is recognized as an urban land use.
    - Provide financial support to urban agricultural development.
    - Develop market linkages appropriate for urban growers.

5. Implement a school food program, and embed food literacy in the curriculum.
    - Develop a single, integrated school food policy that ensures all children in Ontario have access to healthy, nutritious food at school.
    - Support the use of locally grown food in school food programs.
    - Develop a food literacy curriculum that teaches children healthy eating strategies and how to grow and cook food.
6. Support community food centres.
    - Fund a community food centre pilot project across the province as a way to provide support to low-income communities, deliver food literacy programs, and develop local, sustainable and just food systems.
    - Support research, program development, and evaluation for the community food centre pilots.
7. Establish local food infrastructure through regional food clusters.
    - Stimulate regional food processing by establishing and expanding knowledge networks for producers.
    - Establish an alliance of small and medium-sized food processors.
    - Encourage regional food clusters through targeted investment, favourable legislation, regulations, research, and policy development.
    - Strengthen co-operative legislation to support the development of co-operative models for food processing.
    - Develop scale-appropriate food safety regulations and support compliance by small- and medium-scale processors.
    - Conduct market research and assessment geared towards regional food production and processing.
8. Expand public procurement of local, sustainable food.
    - Develop a local food procurement policy for Ontario.
    - Support supply-chain linkages to strengthen the local, sustainable food sector.
    - Provide a clear definition of local, sustainably grown food.
    - Invest in local food promotional activities.
    - Develop a local food database of producers, processors, and distributors.
9. Link good food with good health.
    - Create an inter-ministerial, cross-sectoral committee to develop a food-systems approach to public health policies and programs.
    - Identify policies and programs that increase demand for, access to, and consumption of healthy food.

- Develop and resource an action plan to implement these programs and policies.

10. Plan for the future of farming and food.
    - Undertake a food-systems planning approach to protecting and strengthening farms and food production in Ontario.
    - Develop a food planning guide for Ontario.
    - Create a provincial food policy and planning council, and farmland/agricultural advisory committees in all municipalities.
    - Implement an *Ontario Farm, Food, and Health Act* that addresses zoning and taxation reform, regional food clusters, improvement of local food distribution, and retail access to healthy food.

Appendix 2: Sustain Ontario Steering Committee and Advisory Council

Sustain Ontario Leadership, 2010

Co-Chairs

Karen Hutchinson, Executive Director, Caledon Countryside Alliance
Bryan Gilvesy, Owner, YU Ranch; Chair, Norfolk County *ALUS* Pilot Project

Steering Committee

Kathryn Scharf (out-going Chair), Program Director, The Stop Community Food Centre
Karen Hutchinson
Bryan Gilvesy
Christie Young, Executive Director, FarmStart
Rod MacRae, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University

Advisory Council

Joan Brady, Women's President, National Farmers Union; Coordinator FoodNet Ontario
Karen Burson, Project Manager, Hamilton Eat Local, Environment Hamilton
David Cohlmeyer, Owner, Cookstown Greens
Vic Daniels, Beef Sector Consultant
Nick Ferri, Chair, Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee; Owner, Big Apple Farm
Debbie Field, Executive Director, FoodShare
Moe Garahan, Director, Just Food Ottawa
Bridget King, Public Health Nutritionist, Sudbury and District Health Unit
Pat Learmonth, Director, Farms at Work
Rebecca LeHeup, Executive Director, Ontario Culinary Tourism Association
Elisa Levi, Aboriginal Health Consultant
Anan Lololi, Executive Director, Afri-Can FoodBasket
Connie Nelson, Professor, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Food Security Research Network
Katherine Pigott, Manager, Healthy Eating and Active Communities, Region of Waterloo Public Health
Jamie Reaume, President, Holland Marsh Grower's Association

Ruth Richardson, Co-Founder, Small Change Fund
Wayne Roberts, Acting Manager, Toronto Food Policy Council, Toronto Public Health
Lori Stahlbrand, President, Local Food Plus
Arlene Stein, Director of Events and Catering, Hart House, University of Toronto
Elbert van Donkersgoed, Consultant
Gary Wilkins, Humber Watershed Specialist, Toronto Region Conservation Authority

References

American Planning Association. 2007. "Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning." http://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/food.htm (date accessed: January 21, 2010)

Association of Local Public Health Agencies. 2009. "Nutritious Food Basket Survey Update – February 2009." http://www.alphaweb.org/files/NFB%20Summary%20Report_2009apr.pdf (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Britten, H., A. Chen et al.. 2009. "Food and Farm Innovation in the Creative Age." Unpublished report. Ryerson University (Planning Studio, School of Urban and Regional Planning). http://sustainontario.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Farm-and-Food-Studio-Kit-09-121.pdf (date accessed: May 27, 2010)

Caldwell, W. 2006. "Jurisdictional Analysis and Best Practices for Land Use Planning Affecting Direct Marketing and Agri-tourism Operations in Ontario." Report to the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association.

Caldwell, W. and C. Dodds-Weir. 2009. "Canadian Approaches to the Preservation of Farmland." *Plan Canada*, 49 (2): 17–20.

Canada's Office of Consumer Affairs. 2004. "Consumer Spending" (Ch. 9). *Consumer Trends Report*. http://www.icce.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/ca02117.html#a95.. (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Canadian American Strategy Review. "Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) – Agreement Summary." http://www.casr.ca/doc-agreement-on-internal-trade.htm. (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Cancer Care Ontario. 2010. "Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, and Healthy Weights Guideline for Public Health in Ontario." http://www.cancercare.on.ca/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=64413 (date accessed April 10, 2010)

Carter-Whitney, M. 2008. "Bringing Local Food Home: Legal, Regulatory and Institutional Barriers to Local Food." Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation Occasional Paper Series. http://www.cielap.org/pdf/CIELAP_FoodLegalBarriers.pdf. (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Chang, H.J. 2009. "Rethinking Public Policy in Agriculture: Lessons from History, Distant and Recent." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36 (3): 477–515

Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada. 2007. “Food Security in Canada: A Leadership Opportunity Towards Health Promotion and Reduction in Chronic Disease.” http://www.foodshedproject.ca/pdf/CDPAC.pdf (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

David Suzuki Foundation. 2008. “Ontario’s Wealth, Canada’s Future: Appreciating the Value of the Greenbelt’s Eco-Services.” http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2008/DSF-Greenbelt-web.pdf (date accessed: May 26,2010)

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (U.K.). 2009. “Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative: An Evaluation.” http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/policy/publicsectorfood/documents/090311-PSFPI-%20evaluation.pdf (date accessed: May 2010)

Donald, B. 2009. “From Kraft to Craft: Innovation and Creativity in Ontario’s Food Economy.” Working Paper Series: Ontario in the Creative Age. Toronto: Martin Prosperity Institute.

Dubé, L., Thomassin, J. Beauvais, and D. Sparling. 2009. “Building Convergence: Toward an Integrated Health & Agri-Food Strategy for Canada.” Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute. http://www.capi-icpa.ca/pdfs/BuildingConvergence_Summary.pdf (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. 2009. “Measuring the Possibilities – Greenbelt Public Awareness 2009.” http://www.greenbelt.ca/node/1281. (date accessed: February 18, 2010)

Government of Canada. 1974. “A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians: A Working Document.” (Lalonde Report) http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-sss/pubs/system-regime/1974-lalonde/index-eng.php (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Graham, H. 2004. “Social Determinants and their Unequal Distribution: Clarifying Policy Understandings.” *Milbank Quarterly* 82(1): 101–124.

He, M., Beynon, C. et al. 2007. “Evaluation of the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program: Final Report.” for Public Health Research, Education and Development Program. London: Middlesex-London Public Health Unit. http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/healthy-eating/NFVP-English-Final_EN.pdf (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Heart and Stroke Foundation. No date. “Food Security Essential to the Heart Health of Ontarians.” http://www.heartandstroke.on.ca/site/c.pvI3IeNWJwE/b.4975117/k.BAD7/Food_Security_Essential_to_the_Heart_Health_of_Ontarians.htm (date accessed: March 12, 2010)

Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force. 2009. “Local Food, Farms & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy.” http://www.foodfarmsjobs.org/ (date accessed: March 15, 2010)

Institute for the Future. No date. “Global Food Outlook: 2020.” http://www.iftf.org/system/files/deliverables/GF_Marketing08no+price_sm.pdf (date accessed: March 12, 2010)

International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development. 2009. *Agriculture at a Crossroads. Volume IV: North America and Europe*. Washington: Island Press.

Kamenz, Geri (Ontario Federation of Agriculture). 2008. Letter. http://www.ofa.on.ca/index.php?p=93&a=1118 (date accessed: February 18, 2010)

Koc, M., R. MacRae, E. Desjardins, and W. Roberts. 2008. “Getting Civil About Food: The Interactions Between Civil Society and the State to Advance Sustainable Food Systems in Canada.” *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 3 (2/3): 122–144.

MacRae, R. 2009. “Advancing Sustainability in the Canadian Food and Agriculture System: New Spaces for Policy Advocacy.” Unpublished paper.

MacRae, R. et al. 2010. “Could Toronto Provide 10% of its Fresh Vegetable Requirements from Within its own Boundary? Part I: Matching Consumption Requirements with Growing Spaces.” Unpublished report. Toronto: York University (Faculty of Environmental Studies).

Morgan, K. and R. Sonnino. 2008. *The School Food Revolution: Public Food and the Challenge of Sustainable Development*. London: Earthscan.

Muller, M. et al. 2009. “Aligning Food Systems Policies to Advance Public Health.” *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 4 (3/4):225–240.

Ontario Association of Food Banks. 2009. “Ontario Hunger Report 2009: Living with Hunger.” http://www.oafb.ca/assets/pdfs/OHR2009Red.pdf (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Ontario Farmland Trust. 2009. “Planning Regional Food Systems: A Guide for Municipal Planning and Development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.” http://www.ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/sites/default/files/Planning_Regional_Food_Systems_FinalJanuary25.pdf (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Ontario Ministry of Education. 2010. “School Food and Beverage Policy.” http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm150.pdf (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Ontario Ministry of the Environment. 2007. “Go Green: Ontario’s Action Plan on Climate Change.” http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/publications/6445e.pdf (date accessed: April 10, 2010)

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. 2008. “Ontario Public Health Standards: Chronic Disease Prevention.” http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/oph_standards/ophs/cdp.html (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion. 2006. “Ontario’s Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living.” http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/heal/actionplan-EN.pdf (date accessed: April 11, 2010)

Ontario Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. 2005. “Backgrounder: Places to Grow Act 2005.” https://www.placestogrow.ca/images/pdfs/backgrounder-PTG_Act.pdf (date accessed: March 15, 2010)

Patel, Raj. 2007. *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power and the Hidden Battle for the World’s Food System*. Toronto: HarperCollins.

Pigott, K. and J.M. Miedema. 2007. “A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Waterloo Region.” Region of Waterloo Public Health.

Pothukuchi, K. 2005. “Community Food Assessment: A First Step in Planning for Community Food Security.” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23 (4).

Public Health Agency of Canada. 2008. “The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on The State of Public Health in Canada 2008.” http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/2008/cphorsphc-respcacsp/index-eng.php (date accessed: April 11, 2010)

Public Works and Government Services Canada. “Policy on Green Procurement.” http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ecologisation-greening/achats-procurement/politique-policy-eng.html (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Seccombe, W. 2007. “A Home-Grown Strategy for Ontario Agriculture: A New Deal for Farmers, a New Relationship with Consumers.” Toronto: Toronto Food Policy Council.

Secretariat for the Intersectoral Healthy Living Network. 2005. “The Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy.” http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hl-vs-strat/pdf/hls_e.pdf (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Skogstad, G. 2008. *Internationalization and Canadian Agriculture: Policy and Governing Paradigms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Statistics Canada. 2004. “Income-Related Household Food Security Status, by Selected Socio-Demographic Variables, Ontario, 2004.” Table S.6 *Canadian Community Health Survey* Table S.6 http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/nutrition/commun/on_table-tableau_on-eng.php (date accessed: April 11, 2010)

Toronto Food Policy Council. 1997. “If the Health Care System Believed ‘You are What You Eat’: Strategies to Integrate our Food and Health Systems.” City of Toronto Public Health.

Town of Markham. 2008. “Markham First Municipality in Canada to Adopt Local Food Plus (LFP) Practices.” Media release. http://www.markham.ca/Markham/Departments/NewsCentre/News/080604_lfp.htm (date accessed: April 7, 2010)

Turvey, J., B. Konyi. 2009. “Farmland Protection and Sustainable Urban Communities in Ontario.” *Plan Canada*, 49 (2): 24–26.

United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables, 2009.” http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/downloads/StateIndicatorReport2009.pdf (date accessed: April 11, 2010)

Ward, V. 2009. “Bringing Local Food to Ontario Schools: The Policy Implications.” Unpublished paper.

Winfield, M. 2007. “An Unimaginative People: Instrument Choice in Canadian Environmental Law and Policy.” 10th Annual Saskatchewan Law Review Lecture, delivered October 15, 2007.

World Health Organization. 2008. “Primary Health Care: Now More than Ever.” http://www.who.int/whr/2008/whr08_en.pdf (date accessed: March 12, 2010)

Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario
Toronto: June 2010

This report was prepared by: Lauren Baker, Philippa Campsie & Katie Rabinowicz

Published by:
George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation
174 Avenue Road
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2J1

Phone: (416) 926-0366
Fax: (416) 926-0370
E-mail: info@metcalffoundation.com
Website: www.metcalffoundation.com

Copies of this report can be downloaded from our website.