

# OFNS

Ontario Food & Nutrition Strategy

A COMPREHENSIVE  
EVIDENCE-INFORMED  
PLAN FOR HEALTHY FOOD  
AND FOOD SYSTEMS  
IN ONTARIO





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy is an expert- and evidence-informed plan for healthy food and food systems in Ontario. Central to the strategy are its goals, which include promoting the wholistic health and well-being of all Ontarians, reducing the burden of obesity and chronic disease among Ontarians and their healthcare system, strengthening the provincial economy and promoting resiliency of Ontario's food systems. Poor nutrition and barriers affecting access to healthy food are important risk factors contributing to the alarming health, economic and social burdens of chronic disease in Ontario. The province has seen a rise in the prevalence of childhood obesity and chronic disease in the population. Chronic diseases are the number one killer in Ontario, accounting for a mortality rate of 79 per cent.<sup>1</sup> These conditions affect the quality of life of individual Ontarians, community strength and well-being, and the economy through lost labour and the resulting increased costs on the healthcare system.

Preventable illnesses, to which unhealthy eating contributes, make up an estimated 25 per cent of healthcare costs in Ontario.<sup>2</sup> Healthcare costs are projected to reach 70 per cent of the province's total operating budget by 2022.<sup>3</sup>

**This report provides rationale and evidence for each of the 25 priority action areas recommended to create productive, equitable and sustainable food systems that support the wholistic health and well-being of the people of Ontario.**

Healthy eating can reduce the risk of chronic conditions. For example, eating five or more servings of vegetables and fruit a day can reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke by about 20 per cent.<sup>4</sup> However, only 38 per cent of Ontarians age 12 and over reported that they consumed vegetables and fruit five or more times a day, with females (45 per cent) more likely to do so than males (31 per cent).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, 45 per cent of children (ages 12 to 17) in Canada report that they consumed vegetables or fruit at least five times per day<sup>6</sup> and 24 per cent of children (ages three to 17) report drinking soft drinks, fruit drinks or sport drinks every day,<sup>7</sup> indicating a need for a healthier diet throughout the lifecycle.

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*The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy calls for healthy, local food in several priority action areas; the intention for this is to encourage local, municipal and provincial programs and policies to support healthy eating, while driving local economic development when possible.*

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Complicating matters further, 12.5 per cent of Ontario households are food insecure, meaning they do not have a high enough income to purchase an adequate quantity and quality of food to lead a healthy life.<sup>8</sup> Being food insecure increases the risk of chronic disease,<sup>9</sup> impacts mental health<sup>10,11</sup> and is associated with becoming a high-cost user of healthcare.<sup>12,13</sup> These statistics exemplify the dire need for a cross-cutting, comprehensive approach to improving well-being.

Concurrently, Ontario's food systems must strive to be productive, equitable and sustainable for the environment and the livelihood of its workers, and to support the health and well-being of all people in Ontario. Ontario's food systems have a large economic impact, contributing to \$63 billion in sales per year<sup>14</sup> and are the number one employer in the province, providing more than 767,000 jobs.<sup>14,15</sup> Much work has been done in the agriculture sector to address food system concerns. However, more can be done to preserve and expand this sector for present and future generations, including supporting training and recruitment of food systems workers; job safety and sustainable livelihoods; infrastructure growth and innovation; environmental protection of land, forests and waterways; and sustainable practices.

To address the complex and interconnected relationships between the food systems, and health and well-being, a whole-system perspective was applied in the development of the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy and resulted in the following strategic directions:

## **HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS**

People in Ontario have access to and the means to choose and obtain safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable food.

## **FOOD LITERACY & SKILLS**

People in Ontario have the information, knowledge, skills, relationships, capacity and environments to support healthy eating and make healthy choices where they live, gather, work, learn and play.

## **HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS**

Ontario has diverse, healthy and resilient food systems that promote health and contribute to an equitable and prosperous economy.

Twenty-five priority action areas guide work across these three strategic directions. Together, the proposed action areas create a comprehensive provincial food and nutrition strategy framework. The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy report provides evidence-based rationales for each of the 25 action areas, suggests actions to support their implementation and highlights key initiatives presently occurring in the field.

Ontario has made a number of strides in food systems planning through the implementation of several community, organizational and government initiatives. However, there are still areas that require improvement as an overall cohesive food and nutrition strategy for the province has been lacking. Improved linkages and strengthened multi-sectoral planning through the strategy can improve the outcomes of various efforts and lead to a healthier and more productive population, as well as lower healthcare and social costs downstream. Realizing these important changes will require everyone, including civil society, to play a role in creating and sustaining healthy food systems in Ontario. The implementation of a coordinated cross-sector, multi-stakeholder food and nutrition strategy supports alignment and collaboration to ensure healthy food systems are strengthened and maintained in Ontario for the health and well-being of present and future generations.

# ONTARIO FOOD & NUTRITION STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

## MANDATE

- To promote wholistic health and well-being
- To reduce the burden of obesity and chronic disease on people in Ontario and the Ontario healthcare system
- To strengthen the Ontario economy and the resiliency of food systems

## MISSION

- A cross-government, multi-stakeholder coordinated approach to food policy development
- A plan for healthy food and food systems in Ontario

## VISION

- Productive, equitable and sustainable food systems that support the wholistic health and well-being of all people in Ontario

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS:

### HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

People in Ontario have access to and the means to choose and obtain safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable foods.

### FOOD LITERACY & SKILLS

People in Ontario have the information, knowledge, skills, relationships, capacity and environment to support healthy eating and make healthy choices where they live, gather, work, learn and play.

### HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS

Ontario has diverse, healthy and resilient food systems that promote health and contribute to an equitable and prosperous economy.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased individual, household and community food security
- Healthy, local food is available and accessible in all communities
- Increased food literacy and food skills
- Increased consumption of healthy and local food
- Engaged citizens
- Improved wholistic health outcomes
- Increased demand for and production of healthy and local food
- Strengthened economy
- Safe and resilient food systems

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1 HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

- 1.1 Increased individual and household food security
- 1.2 Increased access to safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable food
- 1.3 Increased use of healthy, local food by public sector organizations
- 1.4 Increased distribution and promotion of equitably-priced healthy, local food
- 1.5 Reduced access to high calorie, low-nutrient food, beverages and snacks
- 1.6 Enhanced food access through land use management and planning

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2 FOOD LITERACY AND SKILLS

- 2.1 Increased healthy eating knowledge, skills and capacity
- 2.2 Increased access to public information about healthy eating through retailers and food services
- 2.3 Restricted advertisement of unhealthy food and beverages to children
- 2.4 Increased availability of professional nutrition services
- 2.5 Enhanced services for at-risk populations

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3 HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS

### FOOD PRODUCTION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 Improved economic viability and sustainable livelihoods
- 3.2 Increased protection and use of farmland, forests, waterways and urban land for food production
- 3.3 Enhanced recruitment and skills building to expand food systems workforce
- 3.4 Increased production of healthy and safe food
- 3.5 Increased protection for farm and food workers

### FOOD SYSTEMS EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

- 3.6 Increased demand and preference for Ontario food in all markets
- 3.7 Improved regulation, compliance and opportunities for innovation
- 3.8 Increased innovative financing
- 3.9 Improved infrastructure and resources to support growth

### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- 3.10 Reduced food waste
- 3.11 Increased protection and conservation of land, soil, water and biodiversity
- 3.12 Increased sustainability and safety of fisheries
- 3.13 Improved management of forest and fresh water food systems
- 3.14 Increased recognition of ecosystem goods and services

## ABOUT THE ONTARIO FOOD & NUTRITION STRATEGY

The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy was developed by a dedicated group of key actors with the goal of strengthening Ontario's food systems and improving the health and well-being of Ontarians.

The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy identifies clear, specific policy options that can support current initiatives and inform future food and health policy directions at the provincial and national level.

## WE VALUE

**Health and well-being:** Addressing broader policy issues that influence access to healthy food, food literacy and food systems.

**Sustainability:** Building and supporting healthy, resilient food systems and communities throughout Ontario.

**Collaboration:** Working across sectors to promote evidence-based collective action in food and nutrition.

## KEY ACTORS

Canadian Cancer Society  
Cancer Care Ontario  
Canadian Diabetes Association  
Canadian Environmental Law Association  
Chiefs of Ontario  
Dietitians of Canada  
First Nations & Inuit Health Branch, Ontario Region  
Heart and Stroke Foundation  
Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity  
Ontario Federation of Agriculture  
Ontario First Nations Integrated Health Strategy Working Group  
Ontario Home Economics Association  
Ontario Medical Association  
Ontario Public Health Association  
Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health  
Organic Council of Ontario  
Public Health Ontario  
Ryerson University  
Sustain Ontario  
Toronto Food Policy Council  
University of Guelph  
University of Toronto  
University of Waterloo  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
York University

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