Food Connects Us All

Sustainable Local Food in Southern Ontario

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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.

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Introduction: Food Connects Us All

There was once a time when everyone thought the world was flat. Figuring out that it was round changed how we saw everything. Now the next revolution in perspective has taken hold — the world is not just round, it is connected. The Global Village — Marshall McLuhan's phrase for the connected world created by new communications technologies — has arrived, and not just in communications but also with food and foodways. We think this global food village must be connected by conscience and fairness — to the other villagers, to our environment.

The way we grow, market, process, manufacture, and distribute our food here in Ontario reveals connections across the global village. Ontario's working landscapes, farms, rural communities, and cities are linked in a web of complex exchanges. But our food policies to date have usually ignored that web, dividing rather than connecting. If we are going to build a healthy and sustainable village, we have to make the connections.

Food is connected to every major problem we face as a society – rising medical costs, poverty and hunger, declining farm incomes, the paving-over of farmland, wildlife protection, urban sprawl, youth unemployment, and communities at risk.

These problems will only be solved when we connect the dots.

Local farmers' markets, community and school gardens, food co-ops, urban gardens, farmer training programs, Alternative Land Use Services,[1] new certification regimes — all of these emerging possibilities support healthier, tastier food for all villagers. As this happens, everyone benefits and communities become stronger and more inclusive.

Provincial politics have become increasingly stuck in a frustrating gridlock. We have separate ministries for agriculture, health, economic development, community development, and the environment, as well as a multiplicity of non-governmental organizations, each focused on a single piece of the problem. We are at risk of missing many of the potential connections and the benefits they could generate.[2]

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[1] Under Alternative Land Use Services, farmers who provide ecological goods and services, such as carbon sequestration (keeping carbon in the soil with deep-rooted plants such as prairie grass) or the creation of new wildlife habitat, can receive support and funding.

[2] The above section is based on John Knechtel's *An open letter to the citizens of Ontario, big city, small town, rural, and in-between.* Alphabet City, 2007.

The Metcalf Foundation is interested in "connecting the dots." For the past six years, the Foundation has been seeding 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' stalls, from diversifying street food to creating new built space for community food centres. In the spring of 2007, the Foundation brought together, at two separate meetings, all of its funding partners working on the supply and equitable distribution of local sustainable food in southern Ontario. We wanted to explore the appetite for cooperative, integrated work with the goal of transforming food and agriculture at a system-wide level.

This paper emerged from those discussions. Its aim is to provide a backdrop for further discussions on how a food and agriculture network could move Ontario toward a truly local sustainable food system by working collaboratively and identifying key leverage points for food system change. It is not prescriptive but is, instead, an early articulation of some of the barriers to a local sustainable food system and possible directions for collective work. It is primarily an internal document, intended for the benefit of those currently within the network, however we hope that others will find it useful, and that it contributes to a broader understanding of food system dynamics in this province.

The paper is based on open-ended interviews with 39 people working in the area, as well as a survey of recent research and policy papers on the subject. The interviews raised some ideas that were not brought up at the meetings, while a few ideas from the meetings did not emerge in the individual interviews. This paper is a synthesis of both.

One of the chief findings of this paper is that there are hundreds of people who are actively working to promote local sustainable food in Ontario in a variety of capacities, from community garden organizers to farm inspectors to local economic development officers. Because they are mostly working at a very local, grassroots level, and because there is so much work to do, many of them are unfamiliar with all the other people who are working on similar or related projects, whose efforts might complement their own. There is indeed a need to connect the dots between the key actors and to capitalize on the pool of energy available in southern Ontario to bring about system-wide change.

Another finding is that there are many roads to change. With a food system as large and complex as Ontario's, change will come about by pushing simultaneously and incrementally in a number of directions and discovering "unexpected realignments and new synergies … The very complex forces of interconnection that make systems resistant to change are the same ones that can be harnessed to propel change."[3] The directions explored in this paper are: pressing for policy reform, recreating food distribution channels, building self-

[3] F. Westley, B. Zimmerman, M. Quinn Patton, *Getting to Maybe*, Random House Canada, 2006.

sufficiency, bridging divides, changing the conversation, and drawing in new players and resources. Other directions will emerge.

A third finding is that we are starting to see the long-awaited fruition of the efforts of those who have been working for years and even decades on advancing a local sustainable food system. Public awareness is at an all-time high; governments are using the language of sustainable food advocates; local food has entered the purview of economic development; scholarly reports are starting to identify the connections between food, health, the environment and income; and new forms of distribution are starting to appear. This is good but it is not enough. Now is the time to seize the moment.

The paper is organized into two parts. Part One is a general introduction to the landscape of sustainable local food in southern Ontario – the issues, the policy gaps, and the potential for collaborative efforts. Part Two contains a sampling of some current initiatives, drawing on the experience of the participants in the original meetings, and those of people in their networks.[4]

[4] The focus in this paper is on agriculture (crops and livestock). Other sources of local food do exist, however. Southern Ontario is surrounded by the Great Lakes, and the region has aquaculture operations as well as sport fisheries. Ontario's food supply network also includes apiculture (honey), maple or birch syrup production, and the collection of wild foods for sale and processing (several local companies profit from gathering, packaging, and selling nuts, fiddleheads, wild mushrooms, wild fruits and berries, and even edible weeds).

Part One: Seizing the Moment

Sustainable Local Food in the News

For many people in southern Ontario, it must have seemed that local food emerged quite suddenly as a popular trend in the summer and fall of 2007. The bestseller lists included books such as *The 100-Mile Diet*; *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*; and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Several new farmers' markets opened during the summer. A new magazine called *Edible Toronto: Celebrating the Abundance of Local Foods in the Golden Horseshoe* was launched. Local newspapers ran stories about local food, and the Gardiner Museum and the Canadian Urban Institute sponsored panel discussions on the topic in September 2007. The Planet in Focus film festival in October featured numerous films about food and farming. Alphabet City produced a book of essays, poems, and artwork on the subject of food; the original artwork was also displayed in local galleries. Multistory Complex launched a debate about street food vending that led to a provincial policy change on street food. Local Food Plus secured agreements with a restaurant chain, an independent grocery retailer, and the University of Toronto to serve or sell sustainably grown food from southern Ontario farms.

The emergence of the sustainable local food trend was anything but sudden, of course. The bestselling books chronicled events that had taken place two or three years earlier. The *Edible Toronto* magazine grew out of a U.S. initiative called Edible Communities Inc. that began in 2002. The theme of the Alphabet City book had been chosen two years earlier. Farmers' markets require planning and permissions; food buying agreements take time to hammer out. Many of those who saw their efforts begin to pay off in 2007 had been working to draw attention to sustainable local food and sustainable farming for years, if not decades.

Still, those who had been promoting sustainable local food for years were not only delighted, but somewhat surprised when their efforts really began to take off. David Cohlmeyer of Cookstown Greens said that when an Ipsos-Reid poll taken in December 2006[5] suggested that local food would become a mainstream

[5] "Canadians See Many Benefits of Locally Grown Food," December 1, 2006, Ipsos-Reid press release, http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3298.

trend in 2007, he was skeptical.[6] Karen Hutchison of the Caledon Countryside Alliance, which supports eat local/buy local initiatives, said that although three or four years earlier she had felt like a "lone voice" on the subject of sustainable local food, in 2007 she found many other voices joining hers. Local Food Plus had to take on extra staff to handle a workload that increased sharply over the course of the year as demand skyrocketed.

[6] Presentation to Canadian Urban Institute, September 27, 2007.

Why Sustainable Local Food? Why now?

What accounts for this new interest in a local sustainable food supply? According to Elbert van Donkersgoed of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, those who have been buying local food for years – shopping in farmers' markets, gathering their own produce at pick-your-own operations, buying from farmers' stalls in the countryside – have generally done so because they find the food tastes better, because doing so helps local farmers and the local economy, because it is simply a lot more fun and sociable than shopping in a big box store, and because it builds new bridges between farmers and consumers. Chefs who work with local producers do so because they can get to know who is making the food and link the food back to the land,[7] keep an eye on the quality of the food, and even have a say in what is grown. And members of the Slow Food movement emphasize the value of connections between growers and consumers in building a greater awareness of what one eats. One could call these "pull" factors – that is, factors that attract people to local food.

To these can be added "push" factors that are turning people off mass-produced or imported foods, primarily related to worries about the environment and human health, concerns about the loss of farms and the damage to the local economy caused by reliance on imported foods, and anxiety about the safety of the food supply.

The first environmental push factor is a growing anxiety about climate change and its relationship to greenhouse gas emissions. Long-distance transportation of food by air or truck adds to these emissions. The term "foodmiles" emphasizes the relationship between the calories available in the food and the calories (that is, the energy) expended to transport it to the place where it will be consumed. A study conducted for Waterloo Region found that food items sold in southern Ontario have travelled, on average, about 4,500 kilometres from the place they were grown or raised.[8]

A second environmental push factor is concern over the harmful effects of agricultural chemicals (particularly pesticides and fertilizers) on soil and groundwater, and the need to reduce their use or find alternative methods to sustain productivity and protect food crops from pests and disease. A growing body of research on the health effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides used

[7] As with wine, the quality of the food is related to where it is grown. The notion of *terroir* implies that geography, including soil quality and microclimate, bestows special characteristics on food.

[8] M.Xuereb, *Food Miles: Environmental Implications of Food Imports to Waterloo Region*, Region of Waterloo Public Health, 2005.

in growing or processing food has led to rising demand for pesticide-free, or "organically grown" food (which may or may not be grown locally[9]).

A third environmental push factor is growing unease about the long-term effects of monocultures. Agribusiness thrives on growing massive amounts of a uniform product, but monocultures are precarious and vulnerable to disease or other causes of crop failure.[10] Further, as agribusiness has selected the most reliable or fast-growing species (although not necessarily the best-tasting) on which to focus its efforts, many local and regional varieties of fruits and vegetables have died out.[11] A few smaller producers are trying to ensure the survival of "heritage" or "heirloom" varieties of produce and distributing the seeds of these varieties. Livestock, too, is dominated by a few breeds – those adapted to factory farming methods. Heritage breeds of pigs, sheep, cattle or chickens are relatively rare. But the loss of biodiversity increases the fragility of the food supply.

Economic concerns about Ontario's reliance on imported food are also growing. Ontario imports $4 billion more in food than it exports.[12] In the event of an emergency (a widespread blackout like the one that occurred in August 2003, a flu pandemic, a natural disaster such as a hurricane or ice storm, a terrorist attack, or any event that might close the border to trade), urban areas that depend on imports are vulnerable to breaks in the food distribution chain. According to estimates by retailers, there are only three days worth of fresh food in Toronto at any time[13]; the situation for smaller urban and more rural areas is likely even more precarious. Strengthening the connection between Ontario's cities and towns and their surrounding food-producing regions could go some way towards reducing that vulnerability.

Those who are troubled about peak oil (that is, the dwindling supplies of fossil fuels and the prospect of severe oil shortages and dramatic oil price hikes) also

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[9] According to the Ipsos-Reid survey, nearly half of the people polled believe that local food is not genetically modified, is free of chemicals, and is generally safer to eat than imported food. Although local food in Canada is not necessarily organically grown or GMO-free, clearly many people believe that this is the case.

[10] For example, the recent collapse of bee colonies threatens the almond orchards of California, where 80% of the world's almond crop is grown. Michael Pollan, "Our Decrepit Food Factories," *New York Times Magazine*, December 16, 2007, p. 26.

[11] "A hundred years ago, we had 7,000 apple varieties; today more than 85 percent of them have become extinct. We've also lost more than 90 percent of the varieties of lettuce and corn. Today almost all our milk comes from one breed of cows, most of our eggs from a single strain of hens." Anna Lappé and Bryant Terry, *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen*, New York: Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin, 2006, p. 6.

[12] Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, *Ontario Agri-food Trade by Commodity Group, January through December 2005*, Toronto: OMAFRA, 2006.

[13] Brian Cook, "The State of Toronto's Food," discussion paper prepared for Toronto Public Health, October 2007, draft version.

advocate sustainable local food as a means of future survival in a world in which the costs of long-distance transportation may become prohibitive.[14] But even without the threat of an emergency, import replacement makes sense as a way to strengthen Ontario's economy.

Anxiety about threats to human health are more diffuse, but they include food-borne pathogens and contaminants associated with imported food (*E. coli* on California-grown spinach, pesticides in Peruvian asparagus, avian flu found in birds, malachite green in fish farmed in China, mad cow disease in various countries). The treatment of livestock with antibiotics, a practice that may lead to resistance to antibiotics in humans,[15] is causing concern, as is the use of bovine growth hormone in dairy cattle. There is uncertainty about the long-term effects of eating genetically modified foods – the use of GMO products is strictly regulated in Europe, but not in North America.

And then there is the so-called "obesity epidemic." Rising obesity levels have been attributed to everything from supersized fast food portions[16] to urban sprawl[17] to overproduction in North American agribusiness.[18] Distress over obesity has increased interest in healthy eating and in fresh food, which may boost sales of sustainably grown local food.[19]

Concern is also growing over the rising incidence of diabetes; a recent study conducted in Toronto[20] drew a connection between diabetes and access to fresh, healthy food, which varies according to where one lives in the city. It has long been known that many predominantly low-income neighbourhoods do not have

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[14] The connection between peak oil and locally grown food was made in the Canadian documentary *Escape from Suburbia* (2007), written and directed by Gregory Greene. It was also the subject of a recent Food Down the Road summit entitled "What'll We Do When the Oil Runs Out?" hosted by the National Farmers' Union in Kingston, Ontario.

[15] "According to a study in Veterinary Microbiology, MRSA [methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*] was found on 45 percent of the 20 pig farms sampled in Ontario and in 20 percent of the pig farmers." Michael Pollan, "Our Decrepit Food Factories," *New York Times Magazine*, December 16, 2007, p. 26.

[16] Most memorably, in the 2004 Morgan Spurlock movie, *Super Size Me*, but also in the book *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser, Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

[17] See, for example, Alan Abelsohn, Riina Bray, Catherine Vakil, and David Elliott, *Report on Public Health and Urban Sprawl in Ontario*, Ontario College of Family Physicians, January 2005.

[18] Canada's food system produces 3,550 calories per day per person, compared to the roughly 2,500 per day per person needed for normal living, and considerable food marketing efforts are aimed at encouraging overconsumption to balance this overproduction. Presentation by Dr. Richard Joseph Jackson, Adjunct Professor of Environmental Health and of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley and keynote speaker at the annual conference of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, October 4, 2007, Town of the Blue Mountains.

[19] An article in *Canadian Business* notes that profits are down at traditional fast food chains, and interest in fresh food is growing. Erin Pooley, "A recipe for change," *Canadian Business*, October 22, 2007, p. 26.

[20] R. Glazier and G. Booth, *Neighbourhood Environments and Resources for Healthy Living - A focus on Diabetes in Toronto*, Toronto: Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, November 2007.

either shops or social services that reliably offer supplies of fresh food, a finding that has implications for the health of the people in those neighbourhoods. As those who work in social agencies that promote public health[21] have known for years, these problems go well beyond diabetes and include low birth weight for babies born to women who do not have access to healthy food and behavioural problems among undernourished schoolchildren.

Increasing awareness of the mistreatment of animals in factory farms is also affecting attitudes to industrially produced food. Journalists' exposés about conditions in feedlots, chicken batteries, and slaughterhouses have led some people to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle and others to demand meat from small-scale operations that do not traumatize the animals before they are slaughtered.

Some of these concerns have been building for years, if not decades, such as questions about pesticide use and the humane treatment of animals. But several have emerged in the last few years, such as awareness of the ways in which food production, distribution, and consumption are linked to energy use, climate change, and obesity. Together, long-standing concerns and newer concerns are creating the impetus to change the existing food system.

[21] See, for example, Paul Irish, "Putting a Stop to hunger with dignity," *The Toronto Star*, October 2, 2007, p. U8.

How Close Are We to a Sustainable Local Food System?

These pull and push factors have generated an unprecedented level of interest in sustainable local food. The subject may have reached what Malcolm Gladwell calls "the tipping point," a term borrowed from epidemiology to describe what appears to be the sudden transition that occurs when a cluster of small-scale events evolves into a widespread social trend. Are we at that point in southern Ontario? Answering this question depends on the answers to three other questions about local sustainable food: Is it accessible? Is it equitable? Is it available?

Is it accessible? How easy is it to buy locally grown food?

The 2006 Ipsos-Reid poll and a 2007 survey by Environics for the Greenbelt Foundation[22] found strong support for local food. The Ipsos-Reid poll, conducted in November 2006, noted that 56% of Canadians "always" or "usually" check to see where their fruit and vegetables come from when they are shopping, and 42% regularly buy local food. Environics, which polled people in central Ontario in summer 2007, found that 88% of respondents say they read origin labels on the foods they buy, about 80% prefer to buy locally grown produce, and more than 50% say they do buy local at least once a week.

Encouraging as these results are, they don't give a sense of people's actual shopping and eating habits. These figures presumably include a range of people, from those who shop at farmers' markets year round and make a special point of finding out exactly where their food comes from and how it was grown or raised to those who do most of their shopping at big-box stores and purchase food labelled "Product of Canada" if and when they can find it. In the latter case, given Canada's labelling laws, which allow food packagers to label as Canadian foods that were packaged or processed here, these people may not succeed in actually buying local food.[23] Neil Currie of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture notes that "you sometimes see oranges labelled 'Product of Canada' because they were bagged here. It's really confusing for consumers."

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[22] "At Peak of Ontario's Thanksgiving Harvest, New Poll Finds Overwhelming Majority Prefer to Buy Local Food," http://www.ourgreenbelt.ca.

[23] A CBC *Marketplace* program that aired on October 24, 2007, explained that food can be labelled "Product of Canada" if 51% of production costs (such as overhead, shipping, or labour) were paid in Canada, even if the ingredients are 100% imported.

Most Canadians (85% of southern Ontarians polled by Environics) do all or a large part of their weekly shopping at supermarkets operated by national or regional chains. These stores are supplied by huge regional warehouses and operate on a national procurement policy; smaller local producers cannot meet many of their supply chain requirements. To date, these retailers have not contributed much to the trend of buying local food.[24]

Many of those interviewed for this paper note that the supply chain practices of the major retailers lead to absurd situations: selling imported strawberries when local strawberries are in season (a phenomenon known as "redundant trade"[25]), or transporting a peach from the Niagara region to a remote distribution warehouse, only to ship it back to a Niagara-area supermarket a stone's throw from the orchard in which it grew. As one retailer put it, "Big grocery chains are in the logistics and distribution business, not in the food business." At the same time, local producers still have some way to go before they can meet retailers' demands for consistent quantities and qualities of produce delivered year-round in a market in which most consumers have no sense of food seasons or food origins and expect all products to be available at all times.

From the consumer's point of view, buying local currently involves some inconvenience (farmers' markets may be open only one day a week, stores that sell local food may not offer one-stop-shopping for all the other items people buy along with their groceries) and often, although not necessarily, higher costs. A 100-mile meal is an enjoyable diversion, a 100-mile diet is a full-time job.

What all this means is that an expressed intention to support local sustainable producers and buy local sustainable food is not quite the same thing as the capacity to act on that intention.[26] Translating awareness of local sustainable food into routine actions and habitual behaviour is a long-term process that needs easy access to local sustainable food and positive reinforcement.

Institutional procurement can help. The benefit of procurement is that it ensures a captive market for local sustainable products. Once an institution commits to buying local sustainable food, everyone who gets food from that institution is automatically a consumer of local and sustainable products. These

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[24] Retailers have also been known to refuse to stock items that are labelled in any way that detracts from their existing line of products. For example, Loblaws will not stock food labelled as "GMO-free" because it implies that other foods without this label may contain genetically modified organisms. Comments by Aruna Handa, World Food Day panel discussion, Ryerson University, October 16, 2007.

[25] Alisa Smith and J.B. McKinnon, *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating*, Vintage Canada, 2007, p. 31.

[26] Transportation planners find a similar gap when they conduct polls about transit use in areas with poor or no transit; people generally say they would take transit if they could (if it is convenient and cheap), but when transit service is introduced or increased, the planners seldom see the ridership levels the polls had suggested.

people do not have to make individual decisions to choose local tomatoes, rather than imported ones, they simply eat the local ones. Moreover, with a procurement contract, local producers have a steady, predictable market, which can help them expand, improve operations, take on new staff, or otherwise contribute to the economy.

Food certification can also help consumers in the search for local sustainable food. Organic certification is well-established, and indicates to consumers that food has been raised without added chemicals or unnecessary processing after harvest. New forms of certification are being developed that stand for other sustainable practices – reduced energy use, the humane treatment of animals, or fair labour practices. Certification involves setting standards for each type of food produced, selecting and training inspectors who can implement the standards, and working with farmers and processors to ensure that they meet and maintain the standards.

There are many hopeful signs that suggest that local sustainable food is more readily available. Awareness and access are certainly improving – the City of Toronto is currently drafting a food procurement policy, the phones are ringing constantly at Local Food Plus with interested institutions wanting to participate in the new certification that assures a local sustainable supply, Toronto has seen an increase in the number of farmers' markets and stalls throughout the city – but much more needs to be done to make it easy for people to buy local and sustainable, and what's more, to ensure that access is access for all.

Is it equitable? Sustainable local food for all or just for some?

The Environics survey results indicate differences in buying patterns among women and men, younger and older people, well-educated and less well-educated consumers, urban and rural residents, and households in different income brackets. For example:

- women are more likely than men to say they buy local food at least weekly;
- young people are less likely to check food labels than older people;
- people who have graduated from university are more likely than those with high school or less education to buy organic food;
- rural residents are more likely to buy products that have the labels Locally Grown, Foodland Ontario, or Farm Fresh; and
- people with incomes over $80,000 are more likely to check food labels than people with lower incomes.

The survey also notes that the people surveyed are not fully representative of typical Ontario residents. "The Greenbelt sample differs from a typical Ontario-wide sample in that respondents are somewhat older and fewer have children;

their education and household incomes are higher; and more own rather than rent their residences."

Where do low-income families, the homeless, or vulnerable populations (children, the elderly, the disabled, at-risk youth) fit into the picture?

Access to food itself – regardless of whether it is local or sustainable – is an issue in the province. Much of the research on access to food among low-income, vulnerable, and minority groups is conducted by food banks. Although not all of those who are hungry can or do use food banks, the annual Hunger Count conducted by the Canadian Association of Food Banks provides the best available picture of the state of food insecurity in the country. The *Hunger Count 2006*[27] noted that food banks are continuing to see an increase in the number of people served, with the majority being children, people with disabilities, and the working poor. "Only two percent of all Ontarians who visit food banks each month in Ontario sleep in a shelter or on the streets. Poverty is not just something you pass on the street. It lives next door."[28]

A variety of factors have contributed to the inability of low-income Ontarians to buy healthy food – in particular cuts to social assistance rates and the failure of income-security programs and minimum wage to keep pace with the cost of living. Annual pricing of a "Nutritious Food Basket" by Public Health departments across the province shows that even a basic, frugal diet is out of reach for many low-income people. Add to this the fact that healthy food – such as fruit and vegetables, locally grown or not – is generally acknowledged to be more expensive than highly-processed, high-fat foods, and it becomes apparent that food access is a real problem for many. It is a problem which will inevitably result in the myriad negative health impacts known to be associated with poor diet.

Food banks were created to help those who cannot afford enough food to live on, but social service providers acknowledge that the food bank model is an unsatisfactory stopgap. Many food banks carry only packaged, non-perishable food and rely on donations from the public – which vary throughout the year and many cannot provide the range of foods needed for a healthy diet. "People don't just need any food, they need food that is fresh, pesticide-free, and culturally appropriate … low-income people are often forced to settle for poor quality food and … poor health – mental and physical – is often the result."[29]

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[27] Canadian Association of Food Banks, *Hunger Count 2006*, http://www.cafb-acba.ca/documents/2006_HungerCount_EN_designed.pdf

[28] Canadian Association of Food Banks, *Hunger Count 2007*, http://www.cafb.ca/documents/HungerCount2007.pdf

[29] Nick Saul of The Stop, quoted in Paul Irish, "Putting a Stop to Hunger with Dignity," *The Toronto Star*, October 2, 2007, p. 8.

While food in Canada is relatively cheap in comparison to other western jurisdictions, it is still out of reach financially to an unacceptable percentage of our population. According to Wayne Roberts, the situation may only get worse:

> "The combination of increased population and environment pressures … means that some important system conditions during the early years of cheap food – inexpensive oil and stable weather being the most obvious – no longer apply … People living on low and fixed incomes … will face a new reality. Families that just get through each month now by squeezing their food dollars will start to run out of money before the end of the month. They will brace themselves to go to a food bank for the sake of the kids, then find out that the food bank cupboard is bare, as started to become more common in 2007. Demand on food banks could easily double as this crucial segment of low-income earners enters the ranks of food bank users."[30]

Access is not just a problem of income, but also of geography and distribution. Nina-Marie Lister has mapped Toronto's "food deserts," which she defines as "large gaps in the city where it is difficult or impossible to find a grocery store or supermarket within walking distance, and where the predominant means to buy food is through fast-food outlets and higher-priced convenience stores."[31] A Chicago food activist describes a food desert in this way: "In my neighbourhood, I can buy designer gym shoes, every kind of fast food, junk food, all kinds of malt liquor, illegal drugs, and maybe even a semiautomatic weapon. But I cannot purchase an organic tomato."[32] Urban food deserts largely correspond to low-income neighbourhoods. But food deserts are not just an urban problem; in the middle of agricultural regions dominated by cash crops, access to fresh food may be limited.

Of course food deserts and food banks are merely symptoms of a deeper problem. The fact that in a prosperous nation, in a province that has the capacity to produce and grow enough food to ensure a healthy diet for all its citizens, many families experience hunger or are forced to rely on packaged food is evidence of a growing income gap between the rich and the poor and of the harmful effects of a globalized food system.

It goes without saying that issues of access and affordability are paramount, however, many working in the field base their understanding of food security on

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[30] Wayne Roberts, *The No Nonsense Guide to World Food,* forthcoming, New Internationalist Press, Oxford, 2008.

[31] Nina-Marie Lister, "Placing Food," in *Food*, edited by John Knechtel, Alphabet City/MIT Press, 2007, p. 169.

[32] LaDonna Redmond, quoted in Anna Lappé and Bryant Terry, *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 206, p. 22.

the premise that the ability to access healthy food is situated within an interconnected food system. This system consists of not only the economic policies and systemic factors that impact one's ability to buy food – traditionally seen as the biggest predictor of food security – but also those that produce and market food. A healthy and sustainable agricultural system is a pre-condition for food security, and food industry marketing practices and government health policies strongly impact whether individuals possess the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy food choices. This is an issue that spans a variety of income groups, but that likely affects the lowest-income population the most severely.

Community food security is not just about the cupboards being full but is "a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making."[33]

If we accept this definition of food security, then the answer to our question – is it equitable? – is most certainly no. We've made significant progress in the province – inspiration can be found in good food boxes, the Green Barns development, new forms of urban farming, and the growing number of community kitchens and gardens – but too many people are still hungry and the imperative for local sustainable food slips when the immediate need is accessible, affordable food.

It is available? Can supply meet demand?

Southern Ontario has much of the best farmland in the country and good growing conditions for a range of crops. Agriculture is a huge and hugely important sector of the economy, supporting Ontario's food processing industry, generating billions of dollars in exports, and accounting for tens of thousands of jobs.

At the same time, Ontario agriculture faces many challenges. As Ontario's cities and towns expand, good agricultural land is developed. Although the Greenbelt protects some important farmland, farmland outside the Greenbelt is either less well protected or not protected at all from development. Thousands of acres of farmland in the so-called "whitebelt"[34] are owned by developers in the expectation that urban areas will eventually expand to allow them to be developed.

Development is not the only threat to farmland. Land can go out of production long before the bulldozers appear. The following story, told by Pat Learmonth of

[33] Red Tomato, *Feeding Ourselves: Strategies for a New Illinois Food System*, 2004, pg. 13

[34] In the maps in *Places to Grow: A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, urban areas are shown in grey, the Greenbelt is green, and undesignated land is white – hence the "whitebelt."

Kawartha Heritage Conservancy, is apparently fairly typical. A farmer retires, his children do not want to farm, and he sells the farm to a couple from the city, who want to use it as a recreational property. However, in order to qualify for the reduced property tax available to working farms, the couple needs to find someone to farm the land. They do not know who is who in the local community, so they ask around to the neighbours until they find a nearby farmer who agrees to take hay off the land. This neighbour continues to do so for several years, until he himself is ready to retire. But by this point, the land has deteriorated. There has been no environmental stewardship, no crop rotation, no sustainable practices, and the land has become less productive.

This story illustrates several related issues. First is the question of farm succession. The current generation of farmers is aging and their children are often reluctant to take over the family farm. A 2005 study of farmers in the Greater Golden Horseshoe found that almost 70% of the farmers surveyed did not expect their children to work the farm in the future.[35]

Second, many of those who own farmland and act as landlords are not themselves farmers and have very little experience in agricultural practices. At the same time, their tenants have little incentive to maintain, let alone improve, the land. The amount of farmland that is rented, rather than being farmed by its owners, is rising in central southern Ontario, according to a 2003 study. "The proportion of land under production that is rented rather than owned is often an indicator of the stability of the industry. In 1986, 68.8% of the 4.3 million acres being farmed in the region was owned; 31.2 % was rented. In 2001, 61.6% of the 4.1 million acres of farmland was owned and 38.4% was rented… [Moreover] there is a correlation between proximity to urban areas and a higher percentage of rented land."[36]

Third, the story says something about the need for agricultural and environmental stewardship. Good soil can be degraded or eroded through the inappropriate choice of crops, the lack of crop rotation, and other poor management practices. If landlords do not require good management and tenants have no incentive to provide it, the land is at risk.

Even farmers who own their land are not having an easy time of it. Farmers are subject to a cost-price squeeze – the costs of farming keep increasing (equipment, taxes, labour, quotas), but the money paid for farm products, for the most part, does not. Although dairy, chicken, and egg farmers are part of a quota system that links farm gate prices to cost of production, the farmer's share

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[35] Michael Bunce and Jeanne Maurer, *Prospects for Agriculture in the Toronto Region: The Farmer Perspective*, Neptis Foundation, May 2005.

[36] Margaret Walton, *Agriculture in the Central Ontario Zone*, Neptis Foundation, 2003, p. 7. Walton notes: "Statistics Canada changed the definition of farmland several times between 1986 and 2001, making absolute comparisons impossible. Trends should be reviewed, rather than absolute numbers."

of the consumer dollar has also declined in these commodities in response to productivity gains. Farmers who sell cash crops to corporate buyers, processors, and livestock feeders have faced low prices for commodities such as corn, wheat, and soybeans for many years, although these prices increased in 2007 and are predicted to rise further in the next few years. Farmers who sell produce are competing against big-box stores selling imports purchased at artificially low wholesale prices. Many supermarkets treat fresh produce as a loss leader, and make their profits on processed food. In any case, imported produce is never sold at its true cost, because the environmental and social costs of production and transportation are not factored into the price.[37]

The wages for harvesting fruits and vegetables are so low that Ontario farmers employ migrant workers to do this work. The FARMS program (Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services) brings 17,000 seasonal workers into Ontario each year from the Caribbean and Mexico. Farmers pay a negotiated rate with the government of origin that consists of wages, housing, health benefits, workers compensation, and airfare. The workers live in temporary quarters during the season and return home after the harvest.

Many farmers make ends meet with non-farm income, such as carpentry or equipment repair, a spouse's income, or a subsidiary business. Some hold down full-time jobs and continue farming on evenings and weekends.

Farmers who work on land close to expanding cities and towns are also caught in a land-use squeeze. As subdivisions edge closer to their land, they have to compete with commuter traffic on farm roads and deal with complaints about noise, smells, dust, and other things that offend the new residents. Trespassing is also a problem for farms close to residential areas.

Agricultural infrastructure is disappearing from rural areas – that is, the suppliers, processors, and service providers who support farming, such as equipment sales outlets and repair specialists, small-scale processing plants, or veterinarians who deal with farm animals. The agricultural extension programs that used to provide information and guidance to farmers were cut back in the 1990s. At the same time, new regulations ostensibly intended to raise standards for small-scale food processors were imposed; the cost of meeting these regulations turned out to be so high that many processors and abattoirs in Ontario closed in the 1990s.[38]

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[37] What's more, as Elbert van Donkersgoed notes, "The primary reason produce prices in the GTA are lower than in California is the California produce trade's practice of sending their surplus production to the GTA market to maintain profitable prices in California."

[38] For example, "Prince Edward County…had the second largest canning industry from the 1950s to the 1980s. Now it is non-existent." Holly Grinvalds and Aric McBay, "Inside the Food System of Kingston and Countryside," *The Local Harvest*, published by National Farmers Union Local 316, vol. 2, page 6.

While many Ontario farmers are aging and some are retiring, it is very difficult for new farmers to get started. Land in southern Ontario is expensive – tens of thousands of dollars per acre in areas around Toronto – because, for so long, land near urban areas has been regarded as awaiting development, and the prices reflect the value of developing the land, not farming it. Buying farmland is also not as easy as buying a house: a 25% down payment is required, a sum that is prohibitive for many people.[39]

In a recent survey, Everdale Farm, which provides training to young people in sustainable farming practices, found that only 15% of the people who had received training were actually farming a few years later. One reason is the lack of access to land. Despite rising demand for its programs – about 70 young people each year apply for the six internships Everdale offers – the graduates cannot get land on which to practise the skills they learn. The survey may also reflect the fact that at times farming can be difficult, exhausting, unremunerative, and socially isolating. There are few conventional incentives for young people to take up the kind of farming that produces local food for local markets, other than a strong sense of commitment and passion for the work.

Finally, sustainable food production depends on – indeed, must by definition involve – sustainable environmental practices. The agricultural system at present is geared mainly to large, energy-intensive operations growing commodity crops using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, or intensive livestock operations that depend on economies of scale. Large-scale production, however, is not necessarily profitable. When prices for commodities fall, the only possible response for conventional farmers is to increase the volume of production, which pushes prices down farther, in a descending spiral that is very hard to escape. Farmers have few financial incentives to operate outside this system, which is supported with government money and protected by agricultural policy.

The system is supported by the consumer buying patterns that have developed over the past few decades. As author Bill McKibben notes:

> The deepest problem that local-food efforts face…is that we've gotten used to paying so little for food. It may be expensive in terms of how much oil it requires, and how much greenhouse gas it pours into the atmosphere, and how much tax subsidy it receives, and how much damage it does to local communities, and how many migrant workers it maims, and how much sewage it piles up, and how many

[39] Elbert van Donkersgoed notes: "Even in the Greenbelt, where supposedly value of developing farmland has been removed, farmland sells at a premium due to its amenity value. The value of land for agricultural production is well below its value for a number of other uses, including private rural retreats for exurbanites."

> miles of highway it requires – but boy, when you pull your cart up to the register, it's pretty cheap.[40]

Farmers will need support if this situation is to change. As Bob Bailey of Delta Waterfowl Foundation puts it. "The farming landscape reflects the signals the market sends. Farmers are paid only to provide food and fibre, nothing else." In other words, they are not paid to provide environmental services like clean water, clean air, or endangered species habitat. A few may choose to save a wetland or a woodlot, but most cannot afford to leave land out of production. As for converting to alternative farming methods (such as low-energy-input farming) or alternative crops (Asian vegetables rather than corn and soybeans), most farmers have so much capital tied up in conventional farming that conversion is prohibitive without financial support.

So how close are we to a sustainable local food system? It's a hard question to answer. What we can say is that growing awareness of the value and importance of local food on the part of consumers needs to be translated into support for sustainable local food production, as well as opportunities for the less affluent to participate more fully in the local food system. Although consumer demand for sustainably grown local food is increasing, buying local (and paying the true cost of food) has yet to become a mainstream habit for the majority of consumers.

Access to sustainable local food for low-income and vulnerable populations has improved through the efforts of social service and non-profit groups, and these efforts are gradually moving away from purely charitable services (food banks) towards more local economic and community development (skills training, urban agriculture). However, there are still too many people in southern Ontario without secure access to fresh, healthy, affordable, and appropriate food.

Meanwhile, too many farmers in southern Ontario are struggling to stay in business, and the barriers to establishing new farmers on the soil are high. Conventional farming practices, using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, are the norm. Stimulating demand must go hand-in-hand with assuring the supply of sustainably grown local food.

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[40] Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2007, p. 89.

Prospects for Collaboration and Joint Action

The Metcalf Foundation works from the premise that we will use all our resources to support long-term change in individuals, in organizations, in civic engagement, in public policy, and ultimately in social values. We work from the premise that our not-for-profit sector is fundamental in this pursuit. Our civil society organizations play a crucial role in everything from addressing complex social issues to sustaining our natural environment. The sector is filled with people of enormous ability and commitment – many of whom were interviewed for this paper – who are achieving extraordinary things under very difficult circumstances. The Foundation is increasingly focused on supporting these people in their work. We want to ensure that they are able to draw more deeply on their gifts and that they have time to think, to collaborate, to innovate and to renew themselves. What's more, we are commited to creating opportunities for new ideas, fresh perspectives, unlikely alliances, and unorthodox approaches to familiar problems.

This was an important motivation in bringing a diverse group of individuals together to talk about food system reform. In this instance, we believe that the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

Before the Foundation convened the first meeting, we asked everyone to send in answers to the question: "What do we need to do in the province to transform our farms and food?" What resulted was a long list of astute suggestions. Our challenge is in connecting the dots between health, environment, social equity, and agriculture and, in so doing, finding new, innovative, and integrated solutions to the problems that prohibit us from moving closer to the food system we want.

In this section, we explore six possible collaborations:

- pressing for policy reform,
- remaking the middle,
- building self-sufficiency,
- bridging divides,
- changing the conversation, and
- drawing in new players and new resources.

Within each area, there are many opportunities to bring about needed change. However, there are too many ideas to tackle all of them at once. Therefore, each subsection concludes with a question intended to focus the network's efforts and set priorities for cooperation and action.

Pressing for policy reform

Federal policy: A number of interviewees suggested that Canada's lack of a national food policy is a barrier to progress on transforming Canada's food system and supporting food producers who serve the domestic market. Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, heralded with such fanfare in 1998 following the 1996 World Food Summit, has been largely set aside. What would it take to make food a national (and provincial) priority once again?

At present, federal agriculture policy in Canada is mainly focused on support for commodity crops, livestock operations, and food processing, as well as food safety standards. (As a result, much food policy – in terms of definitions, regulations, and trade – is set by supranational bodies, such as the World Trade Organization or NAFTA.) Some of those interviewed think that there is need for a change in the government's focus, to provide system-wide support for food grown using sustainable methods to replace imports and feed Canadians while benefiting local agricultural producers and local economies. Such a change in focus, which would take perhaps ten years to phase in, would affect many government policies, both federal and provincial: research, technology transfer, subsidies, land use, and regulations.

Federal government funding may be needed to ensure that Ontario farmers compete on a level playing field with their competitors in the United States and Quebec. As Elbert van Donkersgoed notes, "There is a well-developed rhetoric among farmers that they prefer to receive their returns from the marketplace. However, when the marketplace fails, subsidies are necessary." Ontario farmers operate in the most open and volatile of all markets, and they face considerable risks. If demand for a product increases and the price paid by consumers or processors goes up, the entry of additional farmers into the market lowers the price again, sometimes to the point at which farmers lose money on the new products. Appropriate government programs could help reduce farmers' exposure to market risks they cannot control.

There are precedents for government intervention in the agricultural marketplace. The Ontario wine industry benefited from (provincial) government support that allowed farmers to rip out Concord grape vines and plant wine varietals and survive through the first few years of low production. The transition took many years, as well as research on appropriate strains and on growing techniques. A case could be made for similar programs that could support farmers making the transition from conventional to sustainable practices, or from cash crops to fresh produce or entirely new kinds of crops.

Labelling laws are also an area where change may be needed. If people who are motivated to buy local products cannot be sure that what they are buying is actually local, or even Canadian, then they will quickly become frustrated. Recent changes to United States labelling regulations make the need to review

Canadian labelling laws more urgent. Although the food industry opposed the new legislation, in 2007 U.S. Congress passed Country of Origin rules requiring that every ingredient in any foodstuff be identified by country of origin. These rules even require that a food product with multiple origins should be labelled accurately (for example, a cow raised in one country and slaughtered in another). Although implementing these regulations is difficult and the U.S. government may streamline them somewhat, they may have unfortunate results for Canadian food and agriculture if other countries that cannot comply with the U.S. regulations "dump" their products into Canada.[41] If Canada passed identical legislation, this problem could be avoided, along with the current problems caused by misleading labelling, that allow processors to label foods "product of Canada," if they are processed or packaged in Canada. Although the Ontario Federation of Agriculture is working on labelling reform at the federal level, their work could be supported by lobbying or campaigns that demonstrate that Canadians want and demand these changes.

Provincial policy: Current provincial agricultural policy is focused to a large extent on food safety. Some of the required policy reform at this level may involve re-establishing provincial programs that have suffered from cutbacks or that have been eliminated over the past few decades. For example, programs that used to support small-scale start-ups in farming have been phased out, along with income-support programs (such as the Net Income Stabilization Account program) that helped farmers weather price changes and unforeseen downturns. The latter have been replaced with private insurance, which operates differently and does not reward success.

Provincial agricultural extension programs have also been cut back and remaining programs are focused on sector support rather than individual support. Extension programs used to give farmers access to research on new methods and crops. Today, some farmers hire consultants for advice, some get advice from representatives of the chemical companies that sell fertilizer and pesticides, and others just learn the hard way – from their own mistakes. Government-supported research is needed into sustainable farming practices, appropriate technology for small-scale farms, the effects of climate change on Ontario's agricultural regions, the prospects for new kinds of crops, and ways to process and preserve what is grown, and the results of this research should be disseminated through re-instituted extension programs.

Several of the interviewees felt that provincial policy was responsible for the closure of many of Ontario's small- and medium-scale food processors and abattoirs. However, it is not clear how such policy could be amended or how

[41] Interview with Neil Currie, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, October 22, 2007.

processing capacity could be rebuilt. Research is probably needed to determine how to restore this lost piece of Ontario's local food system.

The provincial government does offer some support for environmentally sustainable practices through the voluntary Environmental Farm Plan program. About 35,000 farmers have voluntarily enrolled in the program, which supports best management practices in agriculture.[42] Other provincial environmental initiatives, including the *Nutrient Management Act* and the *Clean Water Act*, are seen to impose costs on farmers, although the government does offer financial assistance to help farmers comply with the acts. Many farmers have a great deal of capital tied up in conventional equipment and methods, and cannot afford to switch to alternative methods or new kinds of crops. Government support for making such transitions would increase the amount of land that is farmed in a sustainable manner.

Despite demonstrable successes, the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program (which is currently administered through non-profit groups),[43] does not have enough funding to pay farmers fully for producing ecological goods and services. Although it has been embraced enthusiastically in other provinces by both agricultural and conservation groups, it is still only a pilot program in Ontario. Adoption of ALUS by the government would involve a fairly radical redistribution of government funding affecting existing farming and conservation groups, which have come to depend on the current structure of government funding.[44]

The provincial government also has a role to play in bridging the gulf between those who could farm and the land available for farming. Although the Greenbelt has protected much potential farmland from development, farmland to the north and south of the Greenbelt is still viewed as land awaiting development, and its price reflects that status. Organizations such as the Ontario Farmland Trust are working to secure more land for farming, but developers are still the biggest landholders of land near urban areas, and it is not in their interest to support sustainable local agriculture. The provincial government could intervene, buying working farms from retiring farmers and renting them back to new farmers at affordable prices in an arrangement that Wayne Roberts of the

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[42] According to several interviewees, the Environmental Farm Plan, which is a cost-shared by the province and the federal government and delivered by the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition, useful as it is, mostly calls for small, discrete changes in daily routines, rather than a shift in philosophy towards sustainable agricultural policies.

[43] This program is described in Part Two of the paper, on page 52.

[44] Alternative, or Alternate, Land Use Services is one very specific example of a program that was developed to deliver payments to farmers for the ecological goods and services they provide. It is not the only way that ecological good and services are delivered.

Toronto Food Policy Council calls "farm condominiums."[45] Another option would be a system of agricultural conservation easements, similar to those used to preserve built heritage, that would place restrictive covenants on the land to prevent development. Still another option that some environmental groups advocate is an expansion of the Greenbelt itself.

At the same time, there is a need to address the looming shortage of experienced farmers as the current generation of farmers ages and eventually retires. This shortage is not being treated with anything like the urgency associated with shortages of skilled workers in other fields, such as health care or information technology. Small communities offer a wealth of perks and incentives to young doctors to support the increasing demand for health care services, but there is nothing available for those who are willing and able to go into farming as a career. It is particularly difficult for immigrants to get started. Provincial support is needed in this area.

Another group that needs support and training consists of the non-farming landlords who own land that farmers rent. Landlords who know little about the environmental stewardship of land are not going to encourage their tenants to use sustainable practices. The province is not addressing this issue at present, but it is a situation that is likely to increase, with potentially serious consequences for Ontario food production.

Provincial policy reform is required to address inequities in food access and distribution. Health Care Providers Against Poverty[46] is trying to highlight the root problem of inadequate income. Using provincial regulations which recognize that health outcomes of those living in poverty are often related to their access to resources, their members (health providers) assess social assistance recipients for the so-called Special Diet and other allowances that can provide additional resources. At present, so much attention is focused on the "obesity epidemic" that other connections between food and health have not generated the same urgency. Advocacy on behalf of families in poverty for adequate benefits, and attempts to get the medical profession more involved in food issues, should include a comparison of the costs of providing a healthy diet to low-income families and the much greater health care costs associated with treating the effects of hunger and poor nutrition: treatment of chronic diseases, hospital stays, disability allowances.

Organizations like The Stop Community Food Centre have been working with Public Health Departments to inject a concern about access to healthy food into provincial health and income policy. The provincial government has committed to developing a poverty reduction strategy, the first stages of which will be to

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[45] Quoted in Catherine Porter, "A Farewell to Farms," *The Toronto Star*, November 25, 2007.

[46] This program is described on page 47.

develop poverty indicators and benchmarks in order to be able to measure impacts of future actions. Although provincially-mandated Nutritious Food Basket pricing is carried out each year under the direction of the Ontario Ministry of Health, this information has never been used as the basis for any policies to promote the ability of people accessing provincially-delivered income security programs. For example, Ontario Works benefits are broken down into two portions, the shelter allowance and the basic needs allowance. No provision is made for food, and when market costs for food, housing and other personal needs are separately reckoned, by even the most frugal measures, rates fall disastrously short. Because paying the rent is of paramount importance for poor and working poor families, by necessity the purchase of healthy food moves down the priority list for many, and food banks see a resulting rise in use. Food indicators, such as the ability to buy the Nutritious Food Basket and the level of food bank use in the province could be considered as important poverty indicators. Anti-poverty strategies could integrate an analysis of the actual cost of living – including food – in pointing the way forward for issues such as setting social assistance and disability benefits, as well as minimum wage rates.

Supporting and expanding creative, community-based food programs is another way that the provincial government could achieve a variety of objectives related to food access while also addressing questions of sustainable and local food. For example, the government could expand and provide provincial support for versions of the Good Food Box program so that it provides fresh local sustainable food to low-income families, seniors, the disabled, and other vulnerable populations in communities throughout Ontario. Provincially supported community food centres, potentially based in community health centres, where people can learn how to choose, grow, and prepare healthy food as well as about food issues, would be another initiative that could be considered at the provincial level.

Programs such as the Women Infants and Children program in the United States, whereby vouchers that can be redeemed at farmers markets by pregnant women participating in the program, have potential to be replicated in Ontario as a way to both increase access to food for some part of the low-income population, while also increasing the viability of the local farm economy.

Provincial education policy/school board policy: Many of the health problems related to poor diet begin early in life. Too many schools still provide mostly packaged and fast food for students. As food writer James Chatto puts it, “Children in the Gobi Desert are better fed than ours… It’s stupid as well as shameful that Canada is one of the only developed countries without a federally funded nutrition program guaranteeing every child and teen at least one healthy

snack or meal a day."[47] In December 2007, the Ontario government announced legislation (the *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act*) to eliminate foods with trans-fat (with a few exceptions), ban junk food from vending machines, and offer healthier food choices in school cafeterias.

This is an important start, but changing schoolchildren's eating habits means a new approach to school food budgets. A Minnesota study found that providing healthy food in schools involved higher labour costs (for food made from scratch), offset by lower costs for processed food.[48] There may also be a need for training for the people who prepare school food, who at present require few skills since they are required mainly to heat up prepared, processed foods.

Municipal policy: Farmers who sell directly to the public through roadside stands, on-farm shops, pick-your-own operations, farmers' markets, and sales direct to restaurants face a patchwork of different regulations and restrictions, depending on where they live. Research at the University of Guelph[49] offers recommendations based on best practices from various jurisdictions that would help municipalities support their local agricultural producers, while minimizing land use and other conflicts. The Ontario Farmland Trust is also working with municipalities on farmland preservation and is developing specific policy proposals in this area.

Outdated municipal bylaws may also stand in the way of urban agriculture. Montreal allows urban agriculture as a permanent land use of municipal parks; not coincidentally, it has the largest community garden program in Canada, which is managed at the borough level.[50] This is an approach that could be adopted by Ontario municipalities.

The existence of food deserts reflects poorly on Ontario's community planning system. There is a need to make planning for food part of the municipal planning process. Planning for food should also be part of the curriculum in Ontario's planning schools,[51] and it should be taken into account in the creation of new communities and the redevelopment or intensification of existing communities.

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[47] James Chatto, "Out to Lunch," *Toronto Life*, January 2008, p. 103-4.

[48] Barbara Wagner, Benjamin Senauer, and C. Ford Runge, "An Empirical Analysis of and Policy Recommendations to Improve the Nutritional Quality of School Meals" *Review of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 29 no. 4, Winter 2007, pp. 672-688.

[49] Wayne Caldwell, "Jurisdictional Analysis and Best Practices for Land Use Planning Affecting Direct Marketing and Agri-Tourism Operations in Ontario," prepared for the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association.

[50] Mougeot, Luc J.A., *Growing Better Cities: Urban Agriculture for Sustainable Development*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2006, p. xiv.

[51] Some planning schools do make the connection between food and planning, such as Ryerson University's Department of Urban and Regional Planning, but it is *ad hoc* and largely dependant on the interests of individual instructors.

Multistory Complex, in drawing attention to food vendors, succeeded in changing provincial health policy governing street vending to allow for a wider variety of foods that could be sold by vendors, but the corresponding changes at the municipal level are not yet visible on the streets of Ontario's cities and towns. Test marketing may be needed to determine the best opportunities to offer local, affordable food, cooked on mobile carts. Recently, the New York City municipal government has licensed mobile fruit and vegetable vendors to service low-income neighbourhoods – this is another iteration of the food cart that could be considered at the municipal level, and it could prove particularly valuable if local sustainable food was mandated.

All levels of government: The purchasing power of governments at all levels can be leveraged to support local food through procurement policies for all government programs that buy food.

Progressive policy reform is a huge undertaking that takes years to achieve. Dozens of individuals and organizations are working on new policy measures independently. While there are many individual policies that should be advanced – some of them outlined above – we need to establish the connections between what are now disparate pieces. In this lies a unique opportunity.

One of the Metcalf Foundation's Innovation Fellows, John Stapleton, recently published a report entitled *Why is it so tough to get ahead?,* in which he argues that "interconnected social policy rules punish disadvantaged children during the perilous transition from adolescence to adulthood. They make life tough and discouraging as well for any poor adult who tries to move toward independence. I call it 'pathologizing transition' because it makes getting ahead so hard. It happens when the rules of social programs, taken as a whole, accomplish the opposite of their stated intent."[52]

Could the same be said of policies related to the environment, agriculture, health, and poverty, where individual policies are intended to move us closer to a secure and sustainable food system, but, taken as a whole, block our way to accessible, equitable, available, sustainable food?

Question: ***What policy changes are necessary to advance a local sustainable food system? Which policy measures could all members of a food and agriculture network support? Which policy measures will have the greatest and/or most immediate impact on the local food system?***

[52] John Stapleton, *Why is it so tough to get ahead? How our tangled social programs pathologize the transition to self-reliance,* Toronto, Metcalf Foundation, December 2007, p. 4.

Remaking the middle

A barrier to the more widespread consumption of local sustainable food is the fact that 78% of the retail market is captured by just three large companies: Loblaws, Sobeys, and A&P/Dominion. These companies operate on a massive scale and are so focused on keeping food prices as low as possible that getting them to stock local sustainable food is extremely difficult.[53] All three are said to be in fear of the global giant Wal-Mart, which is making inroads into fresh food retailing, including organics, and has a reputation for driving prices down to levels that are difficult for regional competitors to match.[54]

At the same time, there is a growing body of research on the economic multiplier effects of establishing and supporting local businesses, where profits remain within the community, instead of flowing to shareholders outside the province or the country. "Local businesses spend more locally – on local management, on local advertising, on local services … Because most economic multipliers are in the range of two to four times the initial expenditure, these differences in local business spending will always result in substantially greater benefits to the local economy."[55]

Michigan State University conducted a study in 2006 that found that doubling or tripling the amount of fruits and vegetables sold by Michigan farmers to local outlets could generate up to 1,889 new jobs across the state and $187 million in new personal income.[56] In 1996, the University of Northern Iowa started a local food project that involved finding institutions willing to buy local meat and produce and matching them up with individual farmers and processors who could fill the order. The project, which received grant funding, more than recouped its costs. The organizer, Kamyar Enshaydan, notes, "We figured that for every dollar that we received to do this project we made six and a half dollars stay in our community, in our region."[57]

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[53] Elbert van Donkersgoed notes that, at the Royal Winter Fair in November 2007, visitors to the GTA Agricultural Action Committee display mentioned that Sobeys had featured local products in some of its stores in the past year.

[54] Wal-Mart, in its turn, is said to be in fear of the U.K.-based supermarket chain Tesco. The two have been fighting a price war in the U.K. that is putting intense pressure on smaller food producers in that market. Regulators are sufficiently concerned that they are investigating operations at both chains.

[55] Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, "Frequently Asked Questions About Local First Campaigns, by Michael Shuman, author of *Going Local* and *The Small-Mart Revolution*" http://www.livingeconomies.org/aboutus/faqs-1.

[56] P. Cantrell, D. Conner, G. Erickcek, and M.W. Hamm, *Eat Fresh and Grow Jobs , Michigan*, Michigan Land Use Institute and C.S. Mott Group, Michigan State University, 2006, cited in Brian Cook, "State of Toronto's Food," discussion paper for Toronto Public Health, draft version prepared in October 2007.

[57] Quoted by Nancy Crowfoot, *Market to Market*, PBS program that aired December 13, 2002, transcript available at http://www.iptv.org/mtom/feature.cfm?Fid=142.

Elbert van Donkersgoed of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee notes that what is needed in southern Ontario is a way of connecting smaller and mid-sized productions to food distribution networks, either by brokering connections to larger retailers or by offering a "food Purolator" courier service with refrigerated trucks, able to make just-in-time deliveries to small retailers or restaurants. He also stressed the importance of value-added products, such as prepared meals, to make buying local as attractive and convenient as possible.[58]

Paul Nichol of the Huron Business Development Corporation suggested taking another look at the Good Food Box model and developing alternative versions for new markets (special diets, gourmet, and so forth). Christie Young of FarmStart also mentioned the growing importance of e-commerce to link producers and consumers, and suggested that much more could be done in this area.[59]

Food procurement agreements could also form part of a plan to remake the middle. Public-sector bodies and large institutions have considerable purchasing clout and a commitment by a municipal government, a university, a hospital, or a school board to purchasing a certain quantity of local sustainable food represents solid support for producers. Local Food Plus is working flat out to secure purchasing agreements in the Toronto area; it represents a model that could be replicated in other Ontario municipalities.

Another critical piece of the "middle" is the processors, including grain mills, abbatoirs, cheese plants, canneries, freezer facilities, and many others. Over the last few decades, the vast majority of processors have disappeared as local food sources have lost ground. Food is now generally shipped much farther to the processor than in earlier times, and it then joins a river of food with destinations around the globe.

Those local processors that remain are a valuable resource if we are to increase the production and consumption of food locally. However, many are owned by individuals who, like their farming counterparts, are nearing retirement. They are not necessarily interested in expansion to meet increasing demand, and they may prefer to close their doors rather than ramp up to meet increasing regulatory requirements and the demand for organic certification from local farms. How might they be supported in the transition to new ownership and/or to new forms of certification? How might the number of local processors be

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[58] Van Donkersgoed notes that the environmental movement offers some fairly easy things that people can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy use, such as installing energy-efficient lightbulbs; the local food movement needs to make it equally easy for consumers to do the right thing, by putting local food into the places where people already shop, in a form they already buy, and making it part of their routine.

[59] Young suggests that Amazon.com might be a useful model to study for the way it links multiple producers with multiple buyers.

increased to meet demand? How might facilities such as mills, now disused, be retrofitted and brought back into service?

Finally, it is not possible to discuss food distribution without talking about the role of the Ontario Food Terminal in Toronto. Wayne Roberts makes an analogy between the terminal and Toronto's famous streetcar system: both were once common in cities, and both have been dismantled elsewhere. The organization has the potential to help strengthen the local sustainable food sector, because it offers an alternative to the food warehouses of the major retailers and serves independent grocery stores. It currently runs a daily farmer's market and works closely with local suppliers, but, at present, much of the food that passes in and out is imported.[60]

Question: ***Recognizing the enormity of the task in remaking the middle, where do we find our niche? Are there emerging connections in the food system that deserve particular support? replication? promotion?***

Building self-sufficiency

Several interviewees expressed some discomfort with the term "food security," in relation to low-income and vulnerable populations; many are trying to find another term to express the difficulties faced by low-income or vulnerable populations in trying to maintain a healthy diet. An alternative term might be "food equity," which stresses equitable access to food for all people, regardless of income or location.

Food banks are moving away from the provision of packaged food and more towards programs that combine urban agriculture, local economic development, and skills training. As *Hunger Count 2007* reports, "a more community-centred approach is becoming commonplace in both rural and urban settings in Ontario. Food banks are evolving from the stand-alone operations of the past. Other services, such as referrals, community kitchens, budgeting assistance, community gardens, provincial voting information, nutritional counseling, advocacy, and education are finding their way into Ontario's food bank operations."[61]

In one sense, this is a positive development, because it represents a move away from handouts and towards support for self-sufficiency, and, in another, it

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[60] Pierre Bélanger and Angela Iarocci have conducted excellent research on the Ontario Food Terminal, including circle diagrams indicating the sources of individual fruits and vegetables, and maps of the Terminal's "foodshed." The latter are included in the Alphabet City book, *Food*.

[61] Canadian Association of Food Banks. *Hunger Count 2007*, p. 27. www.cafb.ca/documents/HungerCount2007.pdf.

reveals the state of the social safety net and the multiple needs of low-income and vulnerable populations that are not being met by public-sector agencies.

Initiatives that support low-income families include grow-your-own-food arrangements. Community gardens have many benefits, from community-building to improved nutrition among those who eat the food grown. However, they are not as common as they could be. In 2001, the Toronto Food and Hunger Action Committee set a goal of at least one community garden in each ward of the city by 2003. This goal has not yet been attained. More gardens have opened, but there are long waiting lists for allotments, and it can be difficult to get new community gardens started.[62]

Many interviewees felt that opportunities for urban agriculture were underexploited in Ontario cities and towns. Gary Wilkins of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority mentioned that staff at his Downsview office were trying to get a garden plot started on the property, which occupies a corner of the Downsview Park. The notion suggests a new type of urban agriculture that connects people and food: workplace gardens on otherwise unused lawns in suburban business parks, or on roofs in urban areas.[63] University campuses also offer space for cultivation. Trent University has a large roof garden that grows food for the student-run organic café, The Seasoned Spoon. The campus has recently added a one-acre organic garden to grow more food. Trent students voted for a levy on all students to support the garden, indicating that post-secondary students support local sustainable food.

Ontario has a shortage of school food gardens. A 2006 study by Evergreen found that "only 0.5 percent of Canada's 16,000 schools have food gardens – and these are primarily at elementary schools. In contrast, 5 to 10 percent of schools in the U.K. have food gardens and 30 percent of California schools have them." Barriers to creating more school food gardens include a lack of support from provincial education and agriculture ministries and from the school boards, the need for volunteer labour to keep the garden going, and competing demands on teachers' time.[64]

Food deserts are still a reality in many areas, although progress has been made on some fronts: there are more fresh food stalls in low-income areas. Good Food Boxes offer a partial solution for some families, but they reach only a fraction of

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[62] For example, an attempt to place a garden in Erwin Krickhahn Park in the Bloor-Lansdowne area led to angry confrontations and the garden had to be abandoned. Paul Terefenko, " 'These kids hate veggies': Anti-Giambrone residents' group bulldozes FoodShare garden," *NOW Magazine*, September 27 - October 3, 2007.

[63] Most existing Toronto roof gardens tend to be ornamental (such as those offered by condominium corporations as an amenity for condo dwellers) or part of an environmental project (designed to reduce storm runoff, insulate buildings, or improve air quality).

[64] Evergreen Foundation, "Growing Healthy Food on Canada's School Grounds: A National Strategy," March 2006, http://www.evergreen.ca.

the population in need. The problem is that many people cannot get to ordinary retail stores that sell fresh foods.

The issue of self-sufficiency and food equity is a difficult one. Others engaged in sustainable food system work have recognized the challenges in marrying equitable/affordable and local/sustainable objectives. The consultants to a paper commissioned by a number of Illinois food systems funders entitled "*Feeding Ourselves: Strategies for a New Illinois Food System,"* note that the dynamic relationship between access for everyone and viable farms producing healthy food for local consumption was among the most difficult to understand and resolve in their study.

Question: ***How can we tap the value of a network that aims to marry equitable/affordable and local/sustainable objectives? What can we do ensure that this dynamic relationship is nurtured?***

Bridging divides

From time to time in food discussions, the question of the urban-rural divide comes up. The idea is often expressed in terms of clichés: the effete city slicker vs. the unsophisticated country bumpkin. This is a crude and inaccurate picture. Many urban dwellers have a healthy respect for farmers, who manage businesses every bit as complex and sophisticated as any city-based company. And many farmers appreciate that cities are the key market for their products, and that they depend on those markets for their livelihood. This understanding has been fostered by the increasing popularity of farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture.[65]

Farmers' markets offer city dwellers an opportunity to connect with the people who actually grow the food. Although not all farmers have the time or the inclination to drive to the city and spend a day or more hand-selling their produce item by item, the number of markets has increased dramatically in recent years. However, the markets need careful management, to ensure that the food is actually local, and that jobbers selling imported items from wholesale distribution depots are excluded.

Likewise, CSAs (community-shared agriculture, or consumer-supported agriculture) offer the farmer a predictable urban market for produce and the city dweller a tangible connection with the land. CSAs depend on farmers who can produce a range of different products over the course of a season. CSAs also need to be carefully managed, so that the farmer is not required to lock in a price for the produce that is uneconomical.

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[65] Community-supported agriculture is a form of direct sales from farmer to consumer, in which the consumer commits to buying a certain amount of produce from a farmer over the course of a growing season. Good Food Boxes, however, are made available year round and may contain imported food.

Despite these bridging mechanisms, divides remain. Some of them are more subtle than the simple urban-rural divide. On the outskirts of cities, some of the most rancorous conflicts arise between farmers in the near-urban region and their suburban neighbours. Commuters complain about farm equipment that clogs the roads, and residents complain about noise, smells, and dust from farming operations. Wayne Caldwell, Stewart Hilts, and other researchers at the University of Guelph have done considerable research in this area, which requires both appropriate land use regulation and conflict mediation.[66]

Potential divides lurk even within efforts to ensure food equity. Debbie Field of FoodShare cautions that any attempt to ensure better nutrition for low-income families must not pit their needs against those of farmers, many of whom also have low incomes. Peter Katona of Foodlink Waterloo Region Inc. makes the point that ensuring access to food is not about making food even cheaper: food prices in Canada are already low, it's *housing* that is expensive; the problem for low-income households is not that they cannot afford food, but that they have to spend what money they have on rent and utilities instead.

A series of divides also exists among food producers. The divides are based on what is produced (cash crops vs. fresh produce), how it is grown (conventional methods, no-till, ecological practices, certified organic farming), and to whom it is sold (processors, retailers, direct to consumers). Since different kinds of farmers have different needs and priorities, bringing them together to lobby for particular programs or policies is a challenge.[67]

Question: W*here on the food system landscape are there particular divides? Which divides are the most important to bring together in order for us to advance local sustainable food system goals?*

Changing the Conversation

Where are the "locavores" of the future? Changing the conversation and influencing public opinion could start with developing the taste for fresh local sustainable food among young people. School food gardens are still a rarity, and despite a certain amount of hand-wringing over childhood obesity on the part of physicians and nutritionists, few school nutrition programs have demonstrated real results in keeping children fit and healthy. Research suggests that nutrition

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[66] For example, see Wayne Caldwell, Jennifer Ball, and Sarah Thomson, "Navigating Conflict in the Countryside," *Ontario Planning Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2005.

[67] One participant in the Metcalf Foundation meetings in spring 2007 noted that it is unproductive to criticize "big agriculture" and conventional farmers while trying to promote family farms and smaller-scale producers. There is a need for both large-scale and small-scale producers within the system.

education on its own has little effect on children's eating habits.[68] Education needs to be matched with hands-on programs that help change behaviour, and efforts to change what children eat at home. Paul Finkelstein, who teaches culinary arts at Northwestern Secondary School in Stratford, points out, "You can't just tell kids to eat this but not that… You have to teach them how to connect to food, how to think about what they are eating."[69]

The model provided by the non-profit organization Green Thumbs / Growing Kids, whereby schoolchildren plant seeds in the spring, families tend the garden during the summer, and the class harvests in the fall, is a way to engage children and their parents and to introduce children to healthy eating.[70] Unfortunately, the school board provides little in the way of financial support for the program, whereas in places like California, there is enormous public-sector support for school gardens, and the California School Garden Network, a coalition which brings together the public and private sectors, as well as non-profit agencies, has set a goal of one garden per school.[71] Even though Ontario does not have the growing climate of California, school gardens have been proven to be viable, and especially beneficial in low-income neighbourhoods. There is a need for greater involvement by school boards and the public-sector in this kind of initiative.

Another challenge to the future of the local sustainable food system is the expectation on the part of children (and their parents) that all foods will be available year-round. The prevalence of imported food has erased knowledge about when certain foods are in season, and how to plan menus around seasonal foods. Education in this area could start with some of the chef training programs in community colleges and teacher training programs at universities.

Education is also needed to deal with the current consumer expectation that food should be cheap. Whereas once the average family spent up to a third of the household income on food, today the figure is under 15%. But Canadians do not pay the real cost of food. The hidden costs of transportation, and the ecological and social costs of lax environmental laws and low wages in the countries of

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[68] A July 2007 newspaper article noted that "This spring the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation announced plans to spend $500 million over the next five years to reverse the trend of childhood obesity. It will fund programs that bring supermarkets into poor neighborhoods, studies that measure the weight of children who exercise more at school, meetings of advocates who are seeking to restrict junk food ads. One thing it won't fund: projects that only provide school nutrition education." Martha Mendoza, "Nutrition education ineffective," *USA Today*, July 4, 2007.

[69] Quoted in James Chatto, "Out to Lunch," *Toronto Life*, January 2008, p. 105. Finkelstein's culinary club runs an alternative café called the Screaming Avocado that serves seasonal local food and holds its own in competition with the school's conventional cafeteria. This program provides a model for other schools, although much probably depends on Finkelstein's energetic leadership.

[70] The social benefits should not be overlooked. As Adriana Beemans of TCHC notes, "Any program that involves food and kids brings people together in a positive way."

[71] Centre for Ecoliteracy website, article by A.G. Kawamura, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, "The School in Every Garden," www.ecoliteracy.org.

origin of many foods are never factored in. The demand for cheap food is one of the main reasons why it is so difficult to make an adequate living as a farmer.

Another task in the area of changing the conversation is the development of a consistent, accurate message about local sustainable food. Groups that do *not* sell local food (importers, centralized processors) are beginning to mount their own campaigns to counter the message of "local food = fewer food miles = environmental benefits" with a more complex message about the overall "carbon footprint" of food (representing the energy inputs of growing or raising it, processing it, and transporting it, including the energy consumed by the people involved in these activities). One of the best-known examples is the research sponsored by New Zealand exporters that suggests that lamb raised on the sunny hills of New Zealand and shipped to North American consumers has a smaller "carbon footprint" than lamb raised in wintry Ontario and trucked to markets. The conflicting messages may confuse some consumers.[72] Even researchers are finding it difficult to calculate an accurate measure of the resources used in growing foods in different parts of the world.[73]

However, where produce is concerned, there is an opportunity to present a more direct message to consumers. Rather than thinking in terms of "food miles," perhaps the focus should be on "food days" – the amount of time produce spends in transit. Fruits and vegetables start losing nutrients from the moment they are picked, so local farmers have an advantage if they can get their produce to market faster.

Consumers are also hearing conflicting messages about the health benefits of sustainably grown foods. For example, a front-page article published in 2002 in *The Globe and Mail* was headlined "Organic Crops No More Nutritional."[74] Although the study was based on a small sample and was not peer reviewed (these facts were stated in the article itself), and it pointed out that people who eat organic foods are as concerned about what is *not* in the food (such as pesticides) as they are about its nutritional content, many consumers would remember only the headline that there was no particular nutritional advantage to eating food grown sustainably. There may be a need to move beyond "eat fresh, eat local" slogans and repeatedly remind consumers of the well-

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[72] Margaret Wente, "No rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves," *The Globe and Mail*, September 8, 2007, p. A25. See also Drake Bennett, "The localvore's dilemma," *New York Times*, July 22, 2007, which compares food miles and lifecycle assessment of various foods.

[73] Jennifer Forkes, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto, has attempted to estimate the water, nutrient, and land use inputs of different foods grown in different countries and imported into Canada; she admits that estimating the energy inputs is an overwhelming task she has not yet tackled. At this point in her research, she says she still cannot solve the problem of whether it makes more sense to eat organic imported vs. conventionally grown local produce. "Foodsheds, Footprints and Foodmiles," talk given at University College on December 7, 2007, as part of the Food for Talk series.

[74] Dr. Andre Picard, *The Globe and Mail*, July 8, 2002, A1.

documented health, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainably grown local food. One approach may be to share success stories of local sustainable producers and local sustainable food suppliers.

Question: ***If the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, what could a network do to change the conversation about food with new integrated messages and/or a united research and communications agenda?***

Drawing in new players and new resources

The preceding question leads into this final area in which work is needed. The time is right for extending the message about local sustainable food to new players and for tapping into networks that are not currently supporting local sustainable food. The form and function of a food and agriculture network is still evolving. Regardless of what it looks like in the end, who beyond the network do we need to connect with to help advance the cause? This research involved those with connections to:

- agricultural producers;
- anti-poverty organizations;
- environmental and conservation groups;
- farming, soil, and crop associations;
- food banks and community centres;
- food processing companies;
- food retailers (small and medium-sized);
- gardeners, especially community garden animators;
- government ministries of agriculture and municipal affairs;
- media with an interest in local food, agriculture, or environmental matters;
- municipal housing authorities;
- municipal public health authorities;
- public schools;
- restaurants (local chains and some high-end restaurants); and
- universities.

Who is not included? For example, although the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority is involved in local agriculture, Gary Wilkins of TRCA said he was not aware that other conservation authorities were promoting similar agricultural initiatives. Similarly, although many Ontario universities are represented, several (McMaster, Western Ontario, Windsor) did not appear on the radar. Are they conducting research in this area? Do they have purchasing arrangements with local suppliers? What about hospitals and physicians, faith-

based communities, financial institutions, boards of trade and chambers of commerce, or government departments and agencies other than those immediately concerned with agriculture, health, or the environment, to name just a few?

The connections would be diverse – some of these organizations can help promote local sustainable food, some are potential institutional purchasers, some have the power to influence policy, and others might be able to contribute financial and human resources. The more diverse the supporters of sustainable local food, the more credible and compelling the movement will appear to government and the public.

Question: ***Who needs to be involved in the solution and how?***

Part Two: Who is Doing What

What follows is not an exhaustive inventory, but an overview of work done by those interviewed and others in their networks. Many municipalities are not represented in this snapshot – there are interesting and innovative projects happening in Hamilton, Peel Region, Kingston, the Niagara Region, and elsewhere, but time constraints prevented a fully comprehensive review. This section gives merely a sense of the major areas of activity and a few of the many players.

Stimulating Demand for Sustainable Local Food

Current efforts to boost the demand for local food generally focus on:

- procurement agreements and policies,
- improving retail access to local food,
- food labelling policies and branding efforts,
- food certification programs, and/or
- consumer awareness and education.

Local Food Plus is working on all these fronts at the same time. It has secured agreements with the University of Toronto, Il Fornello restaurants, and Fiesta Farms[75] to serve or sell sustainably grown local food, using the LFP "brand." Branding is a way to get around the labelling laws to let consumers know that the food they are buying is actually local, as well as to give them an assurance about the conditions under which the food was grown based on an independent third-party audit of the producer. The requirements represent a package of environmentally friendly practices that many consumers want to support and that farmers can maintain over the long term. The Local Food Plus consumer awareness campaign is built on the tagline, "Let's go the distance so our food doesn't have to."

[75] These are the customers for which it has carried out launches and public awareness campaigns; it has other procurement agreements, such as with the catering company at the Air Canada Centre, that have not received publicity, largely because of a staff shortage at the Local Food Plus offices.

Similarly, **Foodlink** in Waterloo has developed a "Buy Local! Buy Fresh!" brand that it is beginning to license to food retailers, and has brokered deals between local suppliers and commercial or institutional buyers in Waterloo Region.

The **Toronto Environmental Alliance** is working on procurement, through its Greenbelt in Toronto initiative. It also promotes a "Food from Home" program to encourage food producers to grow non-traditional crops for the diverse ethnic market in Toronto, so people can eat sustainable local food and culturally appropriate food at the same time.

EcoSource, a non-profit agency that connects Mississauga high school students with nearby farms, is in talks with the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to include more local food on cafeteria menus.

The **Ontario Federation of Agriculture** is working with Agriculture Canada to revise and update labelling laws so that consumers who want to buy Canadian products can be better informed about the origins of the food they buy.

Organizations that work to connect consumers and producers include **Foodlink Waterloo Region Inc.** and **Food Down the Road** in Kingston. Both organizations sponsor events that bring together consumers and producers and disseminate information about local food in their areas.

Consumer awareness and education is being tackled on many fronts – perhaps too many. The number and variety of campaigns suggests some duplication of effort that would benefit from collaboration.

- The **Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs** runs a campaign that includes television commercials; the tagline "Pick Ontario Freshness" is designed to support **Foodland Ontario**, a brand established in 1977 to promote Ontario-grown food.
- The **Ontario Federation of Agriculture** is planning a public awareness campaign starting in winter 2007 to emphasize "what Ontario farmers do for you;" this effort is intended to complement existing awareness campaigns.
- **Farmers' Markets Ontario** and the **Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association** promote the benefits of local markets to consumers throughout Ontario.
- The **Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario** (which is part of Foodland Ontario)[76] have Toronto transit ads showcasing Ontario produce.

[76] The Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario is a new organization, formed in 2005, and should not be confused with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, an umbrella organization for 28 smaller commodity-based farm associations, which was formed almost 150 years ago.

- **Homegrown Ontario**, an alliance of Ontario Pork, the Ontario Veal Association, and the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency, promotes locally raised meat.
- **FoodShare** offers promotional materials in support of farmers' markets in Toronto and a website with links to information on fresh food, and has sponsored a research paper on the role of local food systems in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- The **Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC)** maintains a website with connections to information on local food and agriculture.
- Both the **GTAAAC** and the **Toronto Food Policy Council** distribute current information on local food to subscribers through an e-mail listserv.
- The **Ontario Farmland Trust** is planning an educational campaign around the theme, "Places to Grow Food: Keeping Ontario's Farmland in Farming."
- ***The Grower*** magazine has prepared a 12-minute film on local producers that will be shown at the Royal Winter Fair and eventually posted on the web.
- ***Edible Toronto*** is a free magazine available in some independent grocery stores that features local growers and producers. Another local food magazine, ***Tastes Ontario***, will be launched in spring 2008.
- **Harvest Ontario** offers a printed guide to Ontario agri-tourism attractions and a website.
- Local economic development offices in places such as **Huron County** and **Prince Edward County**, as well as groups such as the **Caledon Countryside Alliance**, promote agri-tourism through maps that direct consumers to farmers who do direct sales of local food.
- The **Ontario Ministry of Tourism** supports an Ontario Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, which includes marketing of local products, publicity materials, signs on highways, special events, and the Savour Ontario business-to-business website.
- **www.foodkm.com**, which is sponsored by a coalition of organizations including Harvest Ontario, Ontario Farm Fresh, Homegrown Ontario, and the Ontario Berry Growers Association, allows consumers to find local food suppliers within a 100-km radius of their home.

In addition to these general consumer awareness programs, there are also school nutritional programs. Many of these are sponsored by public health agencies and aimed at improving children's eating habits and preventing obesity. Other programs try to help children understand where their food comes

from. One of these is **Green Thumbs / Growing Kids**, which operates food gardens in several Toronto schools in low-income neighbourhoods, planting in the spring, running summer programs that involve whole families, and harvesting in the fall. The programs involve composting to improve the soil in the schoolyards, and the crops include some plants that are important to certain ethnic communities but are hard to find in stores, such as the greens of the sweet potato plant.

The **Better Daycare Food Network**, formed in 2006, is a coalition of parents who are lobbying for better food in Toronto day cares. They worked with Local Food Plus on a campaign to boost the amount of local food in Toronto municipal daycares, and succeeded in getting a motion passed by Toronto City Council that would guarantee that 10% of the food served in municipal daycares would be local. They are asking the city to adopt the YMCA daycare food standards, which emphasize healthy fresh local food.

These efforts are complemented by the work of **Real Food for Real Kids**, a hybrid non-profit/for-profit catering company that provides food education to very young children through the Centre for Social Innovation.

Connecting Low-Income and Vulnerable Populations to Local Sustainable Food

The term "food security" has had a shifting and sometimes contested meaning over the years. The definition used by the City of Toronto's Food and Hunger Action Committee in 2000 built upon previous definitions, emphasizing access issues experienced at the individual and family level. This definition included the following seven conditions:

1. the availability of a variety of foods at reasonable cost;
2. ready access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternate food sources;
3. sufficient personal income to buy adequate foods for each household member each day;
4. the freedom to choose personally [and culturally] acceptable foods;
5. legitimate confidence in the quality of the foods available;
6. easy access to understandable, accurate information about food and nutrition; and
7. the assurance of a viable and sustainable food production system.[77]

There has been a growth in the number of non-profit initiatives aimed at addressing food security, including non-market initiatives focused on increasing food access and availability (sometimes produced locally and sustainably), along with, to greater and lesser degrees, the policy and skills/education dimensions of building food security.

Many of these programs operate outside conventional market channels. These initiatives include:

- delivering Good Food Box programs to improve access to healthy food;
- providing healthy food to school breakfast and lunch programs;
- operating markets and farm stalls in areas where fresh food is not otherwise available;
- organizing community gardens;
- running community kitchens;
- providing skills training in growing, processing, and preparing food; and

[77] City of Toronto, Food and Hunger Action Committee, *Planting the Seeds*, Phase 1 Report, May 2000, p. 5. The first six points were based on a definition created by the Canadian Dietetic Association. This definition was felt to be more comprehensive than that of the 1996 World Food Summit: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

- offering access to additional social assistance funds to ensure a healthy diet.

FoodShare offers a Good Food Box program, which provides a regular supply of fresh food to more than 3,000 program subscribers and about 300 school food programs. The program is available to all, but it is especially intended to help make fresh food more affordable for low-income households, and it can overcome some of the problems of food deserts, because the food is delivered to community drop-off points. FoodShare tries to ensure that the food it uses is of high quality (no seconds or donated items), of good value (to keep costs down), appropriate, local, and produced using sustainable growing practices. Balancing these requirements can be a challenge, but when local food is in season, and prices and quality are good, FoodShare buys local food.

The Good Food Box model has been adopted by many other communities. FoodShare's website lists a network of more than 30 Good Food Box programs throughout Ontario, many of which use local food where it is available. For example, in Huron County, when a Good Food Box pilot program lost its federal funding, the **Huron Business Development Corporation** kept it going, and secured long-term funding from the County Council on the grounds that the program benefited local Huron producers just as much as the consumers.[78]

FoodShare and **The Stop Community Food Centre** are also partners in the Community Food Animators project, along with the **Toronto Community Housing Corporation**, the **Afri-Can Food Basket**, and the **United Way**. Community Food Animators organize produce stands, community gardens, and community kitchens, mostly in low-income neighbourhoods. These programs go well beyond the model of food banks that simply distribute donated food and are carrying out community development projects that increase local food distribution infrastructure, as well as emphasizing the social and educational opportunities offered by food programs.

The Stop and **FoodShare** operate on a "shared food systems philosophy," that marries low-income issues with agricultural and health concerns. Within the context of a neighbourhood food centre, The Stop carries out emergency food distribution and community food programs like gardens and kitchens, while integrating educational activities and food purchasing practices that reflect their concern with healthy and sustainable local food. The Stop is also planning a new project at the Wychwood car barns in Toronto that will include a greenhouse for growing food year-round as well as a community garden. As ambitious as this project is, the proponents at The Stop see it as the next logical step towards a larger vision: that of a wide network of Community Food Centres

[78] Interview with Paul Nichol, Huron Business Development Corporation, October 26, 2007.

– potentially government-supported or institutionalized – providing the health, social, and economic benefits associated with growing, preparing, and serving food to people throughout the city and beyond, especially those living in food deserts.

The **Toronto and Region Conservation Authority** has placed eight acres of land under management agreement with the City of Toronto. The **Afri-Can Food Basket** is a partner in the project providing education through community animation activities where at-risk youth learn about growing food by a hands-on experience of urban agriculture. The youth are often initially dismayed by the prospect of urban farming, but many respond positively to the summer program.

Evergreen, a non-profit environmental organization, focuses on the naturalization of school grounds and other publicly accessible open spaces. Although the focus is on environmental protection and connecting city dwellers with green space, the organization works in partnerships with groups such as **Ecosource**, an organization based in Peel Region, to promote community gardening and school gardens.

Multistory Complex has succeeded in changing provincial health laws relating to what food can be sold by street vendors, opening the way for selling foods from a range of ethnic traditions. Although the City of Toronto has not yet decided what to permit, the decision may lead to benefits for vendors, many of whom have low incomes, while making a wider range of inexpensive food available to consumers.

The **Toronto Food Business Incubator**, opened in November 2007, provides a certified, commercial-grade kitchen, peer mentors, and advice on finance, food safety, and marketing to start-up food processing companies, including those catering to specific ethnic markets.

Another food initiative that benefits low-income and vulnerable individuals was started by **Health Care Providers Against Poverty**. This network of doctors, nurse practitioners, dietitians, and midwives helps people on social assistance by providing access to a Special Diet Allowance (an additional amount of social assistance money). Under provincial government regulations, professional health care providers can assess social assistance recipients for a number of allowances (including Special Diet) with the potential to maintain or improve their health; the recipient can then claim an additional amount each month in social assistance. This program is significant in the way that it links low incomes, health outcomes, and access to food, and involves health providers, which has a potential role, albeit not fully exploited, to play in promoting healthy food. The network also conducts advocacy on behalf of social assistance recipients.

Toronto Public Health, and other public health agencies across the province, deliver a range of food-related programs. Many of these focus on mothers and children, such as the Healthiest Babies Possible program for high-risk pregnant women. Other programs, many of them delivered with partner agencies, include Plant a Row, Grow a Row (for food gardeners); Take Action Towards Healthy Eating in Schools; and the multicultural Peer Nutrition Program. The Public Health Department is also working on a new **Toronto Food Strategy** to build on earlier work by the Food and Hunger Action Committee in 2000-2001.

The **Toronto Food Policy Council** is a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health that tries to bridge the gap between producers and consumers. It conducts research, publishes discussion papers, sponsors public events related to food, and works with all levels of government on food-related policy. Other municipalities are considering creating similar organizations within their public health units.

The Toronto Food Policy Council, Toronto Public Health, Waterloo Region Public Health, and other Ontario organizations also participate on the Steering Committee of **Food Secure Canada**, a national non-profit that links people working in the area of food security.

Supporting Sustainable Food Production in Southern Ontario

Given all the efforts directed at encouraging consumers to buy local, it is reasonable to ask: is there enough local food to meet the growing demand for it?

Most Ontario agriculture is not geared to growing food for a local market. A sizable proportion of agricultural land is used for non-food operations: sod farms, horse farms, Christmas tree farms, flowers, tobacco (in decline, but not eliminated entirely), crops grown for purposes other than food (such as corn for ethanol).[79] And of those who are growing food crops, another sizable proportion is growing food for export or processing, not for sale directly to Ontario consumers. Stewart Hilts of the University of Guelph estimates that food production for direct consumption in Ontario is probably about 10% to 15% of all Ontario food production.[80]

Many of the farms that sell into farmers' markets and other outlets that serve local consumers are fairly small; some are only a few acres. Others are substantive family farms that supply farmers' markets in their area and operate on-farm shops that attract thousands on summer and fall weekends. Small-scale farming, particularly the kind of farming that uses alternatives to chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified seeds, is particularly intensive and demanding, and it calls for specialized knowledge and skills.

Nevertheless, this sector has the potential to provide more local food than it does at present. Efforts to support food production include:

- preserving the land base;
- helping new or potential farmers get access to land (including land within urban areas that can be used for urban agriculture);
- providing skills training, including sustainable farming skills and business skills;
- supporting farmers who add value to their products, use sustainable growing methods, and provide environmental services;
- maintaining biodiversity; and

[79] Grapes grown for wine could be considered either a food or an input to a luxury good.

[80] On this point Elbert van Donkersgoed notes: "Ontario food processors buy 70% of Ontario production. Much of that processed food qualifies as locally processed, but, in general, it loses its connection to a specific farm or region. It becomes bulk anonymous food rather than branded locally grown food."

- connecting farmers to the market by creating new supply chains that link producers to food processors, restaurants and caterers, retailers, and consumers.

The **Greenbelt**, which contains 7,000 farms, is a government initiative to remove development pressure from environmentally sensitive land, some of which is suitable for farming. The government has also provided funding for complementary initiatives to help farmers continue to farm, such as support for direct sales to consumers through farmgate sales and farmers' markets, grants to help farmers manage their land in an environmentally sustainable manner, and research on ways to help new farmers to get established.

Although the creation of the Greenbelt was an important achievement, protection of the land alone is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for sustainable food production. The **Ontario Farmland Trust** is the only land trust in Ontario that has the specific goal of protecting productive agricultural land, through donations, bequests, and easements.[81] Melissa Watkins of the Trust notes that it is harder to preserve farmland than natural heritage land, because it demands a greater level of monitoring and management than most natural areas. Also, there is virtually no funding currently available to secure threatened farmland in Ontario. We have yet to recognize our best agricultural soils as a limited resource that deserves the same kind of protection that natural features currently receive. Moreover, donors of ecologically significant natural areas may qualify for favourable tax benefits under Environment Canada's Ecological Gift Program, while farmers who voluntarily agree to protect their farms for farming are not currently eligible for the same tax treatment. In an effort to ensure public support for farms, the Trust is preparing "A Citizen's Guide to Farmland Preservation" and working with municipal officials on ways in which they can remove barriers to local food production. (At present, farmers operate in a patchwork of different local regulations that affect land use, tax treatment of farmland, direct farmgate sales, and the ability to advertise.)

The **Toronto and Region Conservation Authority** (**TRCA**), in addition to its role in protecting natural heritage, operates as a farm landlord, renting out about 3,000 acres of its 40,000-acre holdings. Most tenants have one-year leases, and at present there is no requirement to farm the land according to sustainable principles or carry out erosion control. Most of the land is used to grow corn, wheat, barley, or alfalfa. Some TRCA land is also used for community gardens within the city. Options are being investigated to convert a dairy farm in the Albion Hills Conservation Area to some alternative use, such as specialty crops or raising goats for the immigrant market provided continued animal

[81] A number of environmental land trusts also protect some farmland incidentally as part of their mandate to protect lands of ecological significance.

husbandry can be done without compromising environmental objectives. According to Gary Wilkins of the TRCA, the conservation authority has tended to regard agriculture as an interim use compared to forests and wildlife habitat, which are viewed as long-term. However, the TRCA plans to do more to support sustainable agriculture in future, and more land is available in the conservation authority's holdings that could be used for farming.[82] The TRCA is also developing a policy on sustainable near-urban agriculture on its holdings.

For example, **TRCA** is working with **FarmStart** on a project in Brampton; FarmStart will hold the land on a rolling five-year lease,[83] and ensure the land is farmed in an ecologically sound way. FarmStart is an organization that leases arable land and then rents it back to new farmers through their incubator farms facility, where growers have access to the land, equipment, infrastructure, and support needed to start new enterprises. This kind of program allows new farmers to minimize their initial investment and manage the risks of starting up while they hone their skills or business plans, test new crops or growing methods, and develop a market for certain kinds of products.[84]

The **Centre for Land and Water Stewardship** and **FarmStart** have also started an incubator farm near Ajax in partnership with the agency **Community Economic Development for Immigrant Women**. This, and the FarmStart project near Brampton, will venture into the business of growing foods for the immigrant market – such as the fruits and vegetables used in South Asian cuisine that are not traditionally grown in Ontario.[85]

The **Ontario Farmland Trust** and **FarmStart** are jointly developing a project called FarmlandLINK to pair up new farmers with retiring farmers or non-farming landowners who have land available and are interested in supporting the production of new types of crops.

Several groups are working to support local farmers who produce local food for local markets. For example, although farmers are often encouraged to "add value" to their produce by doing some on-farm processing (preserving, baking,

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[82] At a meeting sponsored by the Canadian Urban Institute, a member of the audience mentioned the potential use of conservation authority land for farming, and a farmer present dismissed this idea, since the lands were largely on floodplains. When mentioned to Gary Wilkins, he noted that (a) by no means are all of the conservation authority lands on floodplains and (b) Canada's First Nations farmed in flood plains for thousands of years, and that if risks are mitigated and people are not living on the land, it makes excellent farmland.

[83] Gary Wilkins suggested that it would take an Order in Council to permit even longer leases, such as 10 years, although longer leases offer more stability and better incentive to farm sustainably.

[84] At the farm, a number of hop trellises are visible; the farm manager has spent a great deal of time with the hop grower to design and create the trellises.

[85] In summer 2007, FarmStart ran a demonstration project to see how well crops normally found in much hotter climates (Caribbean hot peppers, okra, sorrel, yard-long beans) would do in the Ontario climate. Catherine Porter, "Immigrant farmers face steep learning curve, many barriers to working the land in Canada," *The Toronto Star*, September 7, 2007.

etc.), those who do so risk having their farms reclassified as "commercial" operations for property tax purposes, which means a steep increase in their property taxes. The **Ontario Federation of Agriculture** is working with the province to find ways to deal with this problem.[86]

The **Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario,** the **Ecological Farmers' Association of Ontario,** and the **Ontario Region of the National Farmers Union** lobbied the Chicken Farmers of Ontario to allow farmers to raise a small flock of chickens and sell the birds directly to consumers. Under previous quota regulations, this had not been permitted, and small farmers who sold a few chickens from time to time were threatened with legal action. In a 2007 pilot program, Ontario farmers who had not purchased a quota were allowed to raise up to 99 egg-laying chickens, up to 300 meat birds, and up to 50 turkeys, and sell the eggs or birds directly from a farm stall without facing a penalty. They may not, however, advertise the eggs or birds in any way. The members of the EFAO are sustainable farmers, who raise the birds humanely and use organic feed, but, until 2007, they could not legally sell the birds they raised. It is not yet known whether this pilot program will be continued.

Support for new farmers takes the form of training or access to land or both. **Everdale Farm** provides training for six interns each year; it is part of the **Craft Ontario** network of 14 ecological or organic farms that together teach sustainable farming skills to about 40 - 45 young people a year. The programs are well-subscribed, indicating that many young people (most of whom did not grow up on a farm) are sufficiently interested in the business to spend a year beginning to learn the necessary skills.[87]

Farmers who want to make the transition to more sustainable practices can receive support through a program called Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS). Under a pilot program in Norfolk County, which is supported by the **Delta Waterfowl Foundation**, farmers who provide ecological goods and services, such as carbon sequestration (keeping carbon in the soil with deep-rooted plants such as prairie grass) or the creation of new wildlife habitat, can receive support and funding. Bryan Gilvesy of YU Ranch, who participates in the program, notes that although the funding he receives is fairly modest, he is discovering that the program benefits him as a farmer in unexpected ways. For example, the program involved installing 30 bluebird boxes, and when the bluebirds took up residence,

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[86] A former student from the University of Guelph, Katherine Grechuta, has conducted research on other barriers to adding value to farm produce on farms.

[87] Tom Hutchinson, who teaches agriculture at Trent University, polled his 50+ students about why they wanted to study agriculture. Half had some background in farming, half had no first-hand farming experience. Among the reasons often cited for studying this subject was self-sufficiency, the desire to have a hand in growing what they ate.

they earned their keep by eating flies off the backs of his Texas longhorn cattle. Before this, he used to douse the cattle in a mixture of diesel fuel and insecticide to discourage flies.

The **Environmental Farm Plan** program, which is cost-shared by the province and the federal government, is also intended to encourage better stewardship of the land. Like ALUS, it is voluntary. Farmers self-assess their farms and identify environmentally sound practices that they can undertake from a checklist of 36 recommended actions.

Efforts to maintain the biodiversity of crops and livestock include the work of **Seeds of Diversity**, probably the best-known source of heirloom seeds for fruits and vegetables. It calls itself a "living gene bank." **Rare Breeds Canada**, headquartered in Castleton, Ontario, with chapters in eastern Ontario and Niagara, is a resource centre for efforts to ensure the survival of rare breeds across Canada.

Several organizations work with farmers to help them reach new markets. Local economic development offices in several Ontario municipalities and counties promote culinary tourism or agri-tourism to help farmers that have vineyards, orchards, or market gardens. These efforts include encouraging direct sales (pick-your-own and farms stalls), farm stays, and the creation of Buy Local maps, guides, and websites. Groups such as the **Caledon Countryside Alliance** bring together producers and buyers (mainly retailers and restaurateurs) to help farmers find new markets for their products.

These efforts are part of a larger movement that emphasizes the benefits of supporting local economies and producers, represented by such groups as the **Business Alliance for Local Living Economies** (BALLE), formed in 2001 in Philadelphia, but now headquartered in San Francisco. BALLE has grown to include 51 other local business networks encompassing more than 15,000 entrepreneurs in the United States and Canada. The only direct Ontario affiliate is Green Enterprise Toronto, although representatives from other organizations, such as the Caledon Countryside Alliance and Huron Business Development, have attended conferences sponsored by BALLE.

A number of interviewees noted that both new and many existing farmers need training in business planning and in marketing their products. The **Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association** has introduced a pilot program to offer training to farmers in drawing up business and marketing plans.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada provide funding for Business Risk Management, Environmental Sustainability, Renewal, Food Safety and Quality, and Science and Innovation as part of a federal-provincial agreement known as the Agricultural Policy Framework, a five-year agreement on agriculture that came into force in 2003.

Finally, there are various organizations involved in promoting organic farming, in many cases by distributing information through websites. **Green Ontario** is a website sponsored by the Conservation Council of Ontario that provides information on organic agriculture. **Organic Advocates** (aka Knives & Forks), founded by chefs Jamie Kennedy and Michael Stadtländer, is a non-profit organization that works to raise awareness and support for organic agriculture. **Canadian Organic Growers** is a national membership-based education and networking organization representing farmers, gardeners, and consumers in all provinces. The **Ontario Natural Food Cooperative** is a natural food distribution cooperative serving stores and buying clubs across Ontario. **Canada's Organic Community** is an independent website with links to certified and uncertified organic farms across the country.

Research on Local Food

Local food advocates also can find support from researchers and research networks at many Ontario universities.

The **University of Guelph** is a centre for both agricultural and rural planning studies. Researchers in the **School of Rural Planning and Development** have produced several helpful papers on avoiding rural land use conflicts and promoting direct sales from farm operations.

Ryerson University's Centre for Studies in Food Security offers a certificate program (in conjunction with the university's School of Nutrition), and sponsors research on the social justice, environmental sustainability, health, and socio-cultural aspects of food security.

The **Centre for Urban Health Initiatives** at the University of Toronto maintains a research interest group on food and health that brings together researchers working on how food policy and programs shape the health of urban residents.

The **Canadian Association for Food Studies** brings together food researchers from across Canada to promote interdisciplinary scholarship on food production, distribution, and consumption.

Several Ontario academics in the planning field belong to a group called **Food Planning**, based at the University of Washington. This group facilitates information sharing among urban planning practitioners and academics interested in connections between urban planning and policy and the food system.

The **North American Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Alliance** was formed in fall 2007, with funding from the Cedar Tree Foundation in Boston, to monitor the dimensions of urban and peri-urban agriculture, disseminate information on its methods and benefits to a wider audience, and engage decision-makers and participants who can help promote it.

Interviews

Bob Bailey, Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Adriana Beemans, Toronto Community Housing Corporation
Michael Bunce, University of Toronto
Wayne Caldwell, University of Guelph
Dorene Collins, OMAFRA
Diana Crosbie, Crosbie Communications
Neil Currie, Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Gavin Dandy, Everdale Environmental Learning Centre
Barbara Emanuel, Toronto Public Health
Debbie Field, FoodShare
Bryan Gilvesy, YU Ranch
Sunday Harrison, Green Thumbs / Growing Kids
Franz Hartman, Toronto Environmental Alliance
Stewart Hilts, University of Guelph
Karen Hutchinson, Caledon Countryside Alliance
Tom Hutchinson, Trent University
Peter Katona, Foodlink Waterloo Region Inc.
John Knechtel, Alphabet City
Pat Learmonth, Kawartha Heritage Conservancy
Nina-Marie Lister, Ryerson University
Janet Maher, Health Care Providers Against Poverty
Joe Nasr, Ryerson University Centre for Studies in Food Security
Paul Nichol, Huron Business Development Corporation
Katie Rabinowicz and Andrea Winkler, Multistory Complex
Jamie Reaume, The Grower Magazine
Wayne Roberts, Toronto Food Policy Council
Pamela Robinson, Ryerson University
Nicola Ross, Alternatives Journal
Harold Rudy, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association
Kathryn Scharf and Nick Saul, The Stop Community Food Centre
Lori Stahlbrand, Local Food Plus
Elbert van Donkersgoed, GTA Agricultural Action Committee
Marcia Wallace, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Melissa Watkins, Ontario Farmland Trust
Gary Wilkins, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
Mark Winfield, York University
Christie Young, FarmStart

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