

## Ontario Edible Education Network Action Plan Draft

### Local and Sustainable Food in Schools

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#### 1. Introduction

The Ontario Edible Education Network (OEEEN), an initiative of Sustain Ontario, exists to bring together groups in Ontario that are connecting children and youth with good food<sup>1</sup>. The network seeks to better enable these groups to share resources, ideas, and experience, work together on advocacy, and facilitate efforts across the province to get children and youth eating, growing, cooking, celebrating, and learning about healthy, local and sustainably produced food. Pursuant to these aims, this Action Plan seeks to address OEEEN's goal of connecting local, sustainably produced foods to children and youth in schools.

In recognition of the fact that local food procurement is best paired with education and therefore has strong links to the other Action Plan areas of: Integrating food into the curriculum, Working outside of the classroom to teach children and youth about food (in particular through farm trips), Establishing and maintaining culinary programs, and Advancing healthy student nutrition programs.

This Action Plan will focus on local and sustainable food procurement as a primary goal with the above areas as supporting factors.

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<sup>1</sup> Good food is defined by OEEEN as: "nourishing and is grown, processed and prepared in a way that respects producers, consumers, communities and the earth. The concept of "good food" recognizes that food passes through a food system (from seed to plate and back to the earth) that involves multiple relationships and interactions between people, animals, and environmental systems. It therefore has deep regard for human dignity and health, animal welfare, social justice and environmental sustainability."

## 2. Summary of the current environment and needs

In advance of this action planning process, Sustain Ontario undertook a survey with 163 respondents as of March 2013. The survey reflected an interest in the use of local food to connect children and youth to good food. 24% of respondents currently have “local food from their farm, distribution centre or kitchen” and 22% wanted to be involved in these activities. Of the isolated data, those respondents actively working on Student Nutrition Programs (SNPs) at 31% of respondents and those working on Culinary Programs (12%) provide a potential pathway for children and youth to access local and sustainable foods in schools. With regards to networking among those who responded that they were working on Student Nutrition programs, the top two activities rated as helpful to their work were “website” (97%) and “Conferences or meetings in regions around the province” (90%). The Culinary Programs deemed a “mentorship program” (87%) and “Conferences or meetings in regions around the province” (86%) as most helpful. With respect to communication, “Bulletins of upcoming events” were said to be most helpful for both, with the Student Nutrition programs at 93% and Culinary Programs at 96%. In terms of Resource and Training Activities, “Online profiles of projects”, “Thematic resources”, and “Online how-to videos” were listed as most helpful to both groups of respondents. In the area of Capacity Building, the top two activities rated as helpful for both groups were “Regional funding” (98% for SNPs and 100% for Culinary Programs) and “Evaluation and documentation tools” (93% for SNPs and 87% for Culinary Programs).

A further understanding of the landscape and needs to enable access to local and sustainable foods in schools were assessed from and research on existing local food models in schools. The following perspectives in the local food system were assessed: Community organizations that coordinate local food programs in schools, Student Nutrition Programs, local food manufacturing, food service providers and school boards. From this research the top needs were identified broadly as funding for food programs human resources and marketing, local food sourcing, distribution, incentives for local food purchasing.

### Still requires feedback from the North

Note: All those interviewed used a definition of “local food” that equated food from Ontario. In some cases, procurement priority was placed on the local geographic region, followed by the province. No program utilized a firm definition of “sustainable”, but top considerations were: food is grown in ecologically sustainable manner, those who grow the food are paid a living wage.

## 3. Goals and Rationale

The key overarching lessons illuminated by the research leading up to this Action Plan include:

- The importance of supporting models of multiple scales including localized, small-scale Farm to School programs while continuing to increase institutional local food champions all along the food distribution chain in order to ensure resiliency of Ontario food programs in schools;
- The need for financial support as systems change all along the food distribution create greater incentive to undertake the challenges of the change;
- The importance of multistakeholder groups in order to understand the regional challenges, opportunities and existing assets in a community to increase local food procurement.

Thus, based on the research and feedback received we recommend the following primary goals:

**Goal 1: Continue to collect data on the successes and challenges of local and sustainable food procurement in schools.** Greater research needs to be completed in Northern Ontario in particular as well as throughout the province as innovation and infrastructure improvements to Ontario's food system continue to develop. Specific research needs to be delivered for "sustainable" Ontario products available and to specifically research options available as there is a gap in this area.

**Goal 2: Secure funding sources for regional food program human resources and marketing.** The cost to maintain personnel to facilitate local food action groups, source local options, make connections with appropriate producers and distributors and train other staff, as well as marketing pieces to promote new local products to distributors and student and parent markets are a necessity as the food system undergoes the change to increase the focus on local procurement.

**Goal 3: Improve local food sourcing and distribution avenues to ensure local food can get to school markets.** Local food infrastructure needs to improve simultaneous with the establishment of regional local food action groups. Regional food hubs have provided a positive model and should continue to be supported and expanded.

**Goal 4: Strengthen policy among school boards, their food service providers and nutrition programs for local food purchasing.** Positive advances have been made in recent Ministry of Education policy, such as the *School Food and Beverage Policy* and *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow* to emphasize environmentally responsible purchasing and the purchase of local food "where possible". Positive models of food service Request for Proposals and contract language should be shared as an inspiration to other school boards across the province to meet the guiding principles laid out in these policy documents.

**Goal 5: Create regional local food school action groups across the province with mentorship from existing successful models.** Multiple stakeholders who influence food procurement in regional school systems need to come together to map assets available locally at school boards across the province, as each region has unique opportunities to increase local food in the school food system.

**Goal 6: Continue to connect both small and large-scale local food projects across the province utilizing the OEEN website, e-newsletter and Bring Food Home Conference.** There are a number of successful Farm to School programs and institutional food procurement policies across the continent that should continue to be highlighted online and at in-person meetings and conferences as inspiration and for the sharing of resources, good practices, and development of policy development.

**4. Recommendations for how to achieve goals and objectives & Priorities, timelines, roles and responsibilities, Resources**

Goal	Actions	Timeline	Roles/ Responsibilities	Resources/Funding
<b>1. Continue to collect data on the successes and challenges of local and sustainable food procurement in schools.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strike subcommittee of OEEN created with local and sustainable food in schools focus</li> </ul>	December 2013	OEEN Coordinator, Steering Committee	Existing OEEN funding, structure
<b>2. Secure funding sources for regional food program human resources and marketing.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As part of the Local Food Act communications, support the concept of inter-ministerial commitment to longer term funding for school board and school board local food projects including the maintenance and expansion of OMAFRA’s Broader Public Sector Fund, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care funding such as the Northern Fruit and Vegetable program and Farm Fresh Fundraiser with emphasis on school board projects,</li> <li>- Continued fundraising efforts by</li> </ul>	-Ongoing	OEEN Network members, Sustain Ontario staff	Local Food Act

	<p>Sustain Ontario to fund OEEN to ensure strong community voice to work in partnership with government institutions and agri-business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compile current local food in schools funding opportunities (ex. Broader Public Sector Fund, Fresh from the Farm Fundraiser, etc.) to prepare to share in combination with pairing with a mentor/consultant</li> </ul>			
<p><b>3. <i>Improve local food sourcing and distribution avenues to ensure local food can get to school markets</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compile updated scan on Regional food hubs (Northumberland, Simcoe, North Toronto, Halton, etc.)</li> <li>- Through Local Food Act communications, increase the capacity of and continue the Rural Economic Development Fund (RED) Program with special emphasis on regional food hubs</li> <li>- Make connections between regional local food school action groups and regional distribution hubs through as in Goal #5</li> </ul>	January 2014		-University intern project overseen by OEEN member organization
<p><b>4. <i>Strengthen policy among school boards, their food service providers and nutrition programs for local food purchasing</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Follow up on Sustain Ontario's recommendation on the Local Food Act, to create a provincial food literacy and Student Nutrition Program policy framework to build market for local food in schools</li> <li>- Explore opportunities to include</li> </ul>	Fall 2013		School Food and Beverage Policy, <i>Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow,</i>

	<p>local food policy language in discussion with the Healthy kids Panel Inter-Ministerial Group of Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Child and Youth Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify mentors with experience in school board local food policy creation to mentor regional school action groups as in Goal #5</li> </ul>			
<p><b>5. Create regional local food school action groups across the province with mentorship from existing successful models.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify key stakeholders in regions across the province who are well positioned to facilitate such groups from community organizations</li> <li>- Identify mentors from within the OEEN community who have had success in delivering similar models</li> </ul>	March 2014	OEEN Local Food Subcommittee and Action Plan leads	Funding will need to be secured
<p><b>6. Continue to connect both small and large-scale local food projects across the province utilizing the OEEN website, e-newsletter and Bring Food Home Conference.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Through website and e-newsletter, share current resources available to boost small-scale fundraising opportunities (ex. Fresh from the Farm Fundraiser and OntarioFresh website linking school programs with local producers interested in serving schools</li> <li>- Seek local food in schools champions from this research to hold local food in schools focused workshop at Bring Food Home</li> </ul>	Ongoing	-OEEN Coordinator and interns -Action Plan leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Fresh-From-The-Farm/About-the-Program--Fresh-from-the-Farm.aspx">http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Fresh-From-The-Farm/About-the-Program--Fresh-from-the-Farm.aspx</a></li> <li>• OntarioFresh – <a href="http://tinyurl.com/mz46cuc">http://tinyurl.com/mz46cuc</a></li> </ul>