



Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021

Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance
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October 1, 2013

William Short
Clerk, Legislative Committee on Social Policy
99 Wellesley Street West Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park Toronto, ON M7A 1A2
william_short@ontla.ola.org

Re: Legislative Committee on Social Policy Hearings on Local Food Act

Dear Mr. Short,

We understand the Legislative Committee on Social Policy is entering into hearings on Bill 36, the Local Food Act, on behalf of the Province of Ontario. On behalf of the Chairs of the Regions of Durham, Halton, Peel York and Niagara, and the Mayors of Hamilton and Toronto, who represent 5 million Ontario voters and have formed the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, we offer the following comments for consideration during the Hearing process, and also request the opportunity to speak to these comments in person during the Hearing sessions.

The Golden Horseshoe of Ontario, stretching along the shores of Lake Ontario, is not only the fastest growing region of Canada with a diverse and sophisticated urban population, it is a vast, rich agricultural area and home to one of the largest food and farming clusters in North America. The one million acres of farmland under production within the boundaries of the Golden Horseshoe region generate in excess of \$1.5 billion in gross farm receipts annually from a production profile that includes 240 different crops and livestock products. Of significance, the Golden Horseshoe also uniquely contains the majority of Ontario's food processing operations, head offices of major food retail merchandisers, Canadian headquarters of global consumer branded food companies and Ontario's food distribution centres.

The **Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan** provides a blueprint for supporting and growing a thriving, integrated food and farming sector in the Golden Horseshoe. It responds to the common challenges and opportunities the area shares. These challenges and opportunities arise from the large concentration of population, growth pressures, conflict between agricultural and urban land uses, and a myriad of regulations and overlapping agencies that affect the food and farming enterprises located within it. The plan focuses on enhancing competitiveness, promoting sustainability and removing barriers that stand in the way of growing the cluster.



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The implementation of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan will help develop the food and farming sector in the Golden Horseshoe by creating a positive environment for investors, seeding new enterprises through commercialization and incubation, and using the experience and connections of the region's diverse population to open markets for new products. Access to an abundant supply of local food, and integration of local food products across the food value chain, is integral to the success of the Action Plan.

As such, we applaud the Province of Ontario for taking steps to enact legislation governing local food. We feel that one of the strengths of the current Bill 36 is the integration of the local food concept in food procurement systems for provincial ministries and agencies of the provincial government. What a great place to start, and it is always best to lead by example.

We would caution, however, against adopting arbitrary targets with respect to local food procurement. We have experienced this unsuccessful approach in the City of Toronto first-hand, and it only created angst and led to backlash against the concept. It is much more important to encourage the idea of local food in public sector procurement systems through education and enablement, adopting the spirit of the concept, rather than through measurables that are impossible to enforce. Therefore, we encourage the province to adopt this system in provincial government ministries and agencies first, while assisting municipalities, institutions, hospitals and other public sector facilities to better understand local food procurement within their systems, and to help them connect with local food suppliers.

At some point in the discussion of local food legislation, there needs to be an emphasis on incubators for food products, food services and farmers. We need to examine how we incubate these concepts throughout the province, looking at the community, identifying the needs and replicating the learnings in processing, production, product development and distribution, as well as including business training.

As an organization representing both fruit and vegetable specialty crop growing areas in the province (Holland Marsh & Niagara Peninsula) within the Golden Horseshoe, we strongly encourage and support the concept of charitable receipts for donations of local food. This is particularly important to our farmers, allowing them to distribute local food to those most in need, in a fair and equitable manner.

As part of the Local Food Fund, we strongly recommend a portion of the fund be directly allocated to communities for local food promotion. We all know that a community organization driven by volunteer energy and engagement is far more efficient, in terms of resource allocation, in promoting the local food concept and achieving goals such as increasing food literacy with an emphasis on youth audiences. For instance, a grant program supporting local fairs and festivals that incorporate and promote local food concepts, education and awareness programs can complement provincial messages such as those offered by Foodland Ontario.

Similarly, incorporation of community gardens on school properties could bring together curriculum, action and tasting, all supporting food education and increasing food literacy in Ontario schools. This concept could culminate in a 'local



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food soup day', perhaps declared provincially and as part of a Local Food Week campaign. These types of concepts cost little but have a huge impact on raising child and youth awareness of where their food comes from.

We have a great opportunity here to further enhance the local food movement in the Province of Ontario. It's important that the provincial government carefully consider their role in local food advancement and not enter into a legislative approach without much forethought and contemplation of the spirit of local food concepts and the details for implementation of the programming.

As a strong collaboration working to grow the food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe, thereby benefitting the entire province of Ontario, we strongly encourage you to incorporate our comments in the next version of the Local Food Act and subsequent regulations and programs. We also request participation in the Hearing sessions, in order to further translate our expertise and expand upon our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Peter Lambrick
Founding Member, Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance