

Comments to the Legislative Committee on Social Policy October 1, 2013

Re: Bill 36 Local Food Act

Delegate: Lynn Roblin, MSc. RD, Chair, Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy – A Plan for Healthy Food and Farming¹

In Ontario, there needs to be an integrated and collaborative approach to food policy across government department and agencies, civil society and private sector interests. Further, an open and transparent mechanism within government, similar to the food policy council model at the municipal level, is required to 1) hold government departments and agencies accountable for supporting local and healthy food and 2) engage civil society, private and citizen interests in food policy.

The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy (OFNS) is a cross-government, multi-stakeholder coordinated approach to food policy development. The vision is for a productive, equitable and sustainable food system that supports the health and well being of Ontarians. It is a plan for healthy food and farming in Ontario.

Goals

1. To promote health through healthy eating and access to healthful food for all Ontarians.
2. To reduce the burden of obesity and chronic disease on Ontarians and the Ontario health care system.
3. To strengthen the Ontario economy and environment through a diverse, healthy and resilient food system.

Strategic Directions

1. Ontarians have access to and the means to obtain safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable food.
2. Ontarians have the information, knowledge, skills, relationships and environment to support healthy eating and make healthy choices where they live, work, learn and play.
3. Ontario has a diverse, healthy and resilient food production system that contributes to an equitable and prosperous economy.

¹ Prepared by the Ontario Food and Nutrition Design Team, September 2013, For more information on the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy visit: <http://sustainontario.com/initiatives/ontario-food-and-nutrition-strategy>

Key priorities from the OFNS that relate to Bill 36: Local Food Act

1.2 Increase access to safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable foods, especially for vulnerable populations

- 1.2.1 Increase the availability of healthy and local food in childcare, preschools, schools, colleges, universities, long term care facilities, hospitals, recreation centres, workplaces and other public facilities.
- 1.2.2 Provide a student vegetable and fruit program in all public schools as part of the proposed elementary school snack program (as per Liberal platform – e.g. Northern Fruit and Vegetable program in all schools).
- 1.2.3 Support community food access solutions that promote the availability and affordability of fresh, locally or regionally grown foods and create opportunities to scale these up throughout the province (e.g. fresh vegetable and fruit boxes and community gardens).

1.3 Increase utilization of Ontario food each year by government institutions

- 1.3.1 Develop local and sustainable food procurement targets for public sector institutions.
- 1.3.2 Provide incentives and training to enable public sector institutions to meet the local and sustainable procurement targets.

1.4 Increase distribution and promotion of healthy and local foods

- 1.4.1 Support farmers and processors to deliver healthy products in demand.
- 1.4.2 Market and promote local and sustainable food.
- 1.4.3 Market, promote and support culinary tourism.

2.1 Increase public understanding of healthy eating practices and skills for making healthy food choices through the lifecycle

- 2.1.2 Increase marketing of healthy foods, particularly to children, youth and parents of young children.
- 2.1.5 Promote healthy eating for preschoolers and young children - at home and daycares, etc. through parent and daycare provider nutrition education, food skills and cue based feeding training
- 2.1.6 Include evidence-based food literacy, education about nutrition, food, growing and producing food, and food skills development as a mandatory part of the curriculum at all grade levels (including adult high school, ESL, FSL, LINC) and provide support for professional development/teacher training.
- 2.1.7 Provide opportunities for individuals and households to develop food selection, food preparation and food safety skills in school and community settings.
- 2.1.8 Support public health and community-based healthy eating and food literacy programs (planning, shopping, cooking, preparation, preservation, food storage and food safety) in schools and community settings (e.g. Community Food Advisors, Colour It Up, community kitchens, community food centres and community gardens)
- 2.1.9 Provide urban dwellers and rural gardeners with easy access to education and information about how to grow food.

3.8 Ensure that Ontario food products are preferred in all markets

- 3.8.1 Maintain an identifiable standard for Ontario food products.

3.8.2 Ensure that Ontario is recognized as a leader in environmentally sustainable food production.

Key outcomes of the OFNS

To increase access to healthy and local foods

To increase demand for and production of healthy and local foods

To increase consumption of healthy and local foods

To reduce reliance on rescue systems

To improve eating behaviours and health outcomes

To encourage safe and sustainable food production

To strengthen the economy through diverse, healthy and resilient food system

Key asks for the Local Food Act

We suggest modifications to the stated Purposes that are more in line with the expected outcomes of the OFNS:

Some specific changes we recommend include:

1. To foster successful and resilient local food economies and systems throughout Ontario.
2. To increase awareness, **access to and consumption** of local food in Ontario, including the diversity of local food.
3. To encourage the development of new markets for local food.
4. **To support local food education, food literacy and food skills.**

Food Access

Ontarians should have access to and the means to obtain safe, healthy, local and culturally acceptable foods. The Local food Act should address the fundamental issue of food access to ensure the health and productivity of Ontario citizens and the healthy growth and development of children. Increasing access to local and healthy foods, especially to vulnerable populations, will impact the health and prosperity of our citizens. Increasing access to healthy and local foods in government and non-government institutions is imperative. Increasing access to local foods in school nutrition programs and community fresh food box programs also needs supporting. *See OFNS priorities 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.*

Local Food education, food literacy and food skills

Local food education will help ensure youth are educated about the relationship between local food systems, the environment, and their health. As a minimum this should include food, agriculture, and garden-based education in across all grades. This would be more robust if this was extended to the community as a whole. *See OFNS priorities 2.1*

Local Food Preferred in all Markets

Ensuring that local foods are preferred in all markets will increase access to and demand for local foods and have positive benefits to the health of citizens and our local, regional and provincial economies. *See OFNS priorities 3.8*

Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy

The Local Food Act, while limited in scope, aligns with a broader Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy (OFNS). The Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity, which is a provincial collaboration of non-profit, health and academic organizations, calls for a cross-government, multi-stakeholder approach to food and policy development that supports good health, a strong economy, and diverse, healthy and resilient food system.

We encourage the Ontario government to use the comprehensive Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy to inform the Local Food Act and further to support the OFNS as a framework for nutrition policy and program development. This strategy has resulted from engagement with over 40 stakeholders and numerous consultations with individuals, groups and organizations from across Ontario. The key requirements of the OFNS are:

- 1. Coordinated provincial mechanism to address food and nutrition policy and programming**
 - a. The provincial mechanism must be cross-government in nature and incorporate a wide range of important stakeholders representing the food system, agriculture, health, education, industry, and civil society
 - b. The mechanism will provide advice to the government on planning, implementing and monitoring effective, equitable and evidence-informed food and nutrition policies and programs
 - c. The mechanism will enable and ensure that clear, effective and timely communication occurs at all levels and among all players with respect to food system decision making

- 2. Systematic approach to monitoring, measurement and analysis of key indicators**
 - a. Traditional and non-traditional population health indicators need to be captured, including health, social, economic, environmental, food and agricultural indicators
 - b. Dissemination of key indicators to measure progress of the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy

- 3. Sufficient capacity and resources to support all elements of the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy**
 - a. Funding for the coordinated provincial mechanism and a food and nutrition advisory council including key stakeholders
 - b. Investment in initiatives aimed at achieving Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy expected outcomes, through reallocation of funds and savings from inter-ministerial collaboration.
 - c. Research, innovation and knowledge exchange to advance the goals of the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy

The strategy can be downloaded from the Sustain Ontario Website:
<http://sustainontario.com/initiatives/ontario-food-and-nutrition-strategy>

The mission of the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (OCGHEPA) is to improve the health of all Ontarians by advancing healthy eating and physical activity initiatives through strategic partnerships, knowledge exchange and collective action. We envision an Ontario that supports healthy eating and active living for all.*

**The Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity is a provincial collaboration of non-profit, health and academic organizations dedicated to addressing population-based issues relating to healthy eating, physical activity, healthy weights and the determinants of health, including food access, availability and adequacy. Partners on the Advocacy Subcommittee include Breakfast for Learning, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Diabetes Association, Dietitians of Canada, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Management in Public Health, Ophea and Sustain Ontario.*