



Bryan Gilvesy and Karen Hutchinson, Co-Chairs
Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming
365-401 Richmond Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 3A8
1-647-348-0235

October 22, 2013

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

Re: Legislative Committee on Social Policy Hearings on the Proposed *Local Food Act*

Dear Mr. Short,

We understand that the Legislative Committee on Social Policy is reviewing Bill 36, the Local Food Act and has asked for submissions with regards to the Bill.

Sustain Ontario – the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming was established in 2009 to be the provincial voice for organizations looking to improve our food system into one that is healthy, equitable, ecological and financially viable. Currently, the Alliance has over 420 members from across the province including private, public and not-for-profit actors.

Sustain Ontario applauds the government in introducing of *Bill 36 - An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013 (Local Food Act)*. Such legislation serves to highlight to the public the importance of local food and farming systems across Ontario.

Considerable work has been done already on developing local food systems but more needs to be accomplished across the province to ensure that Ontario's food system is healthy, equitable, ecological and financially viable. We hope that the goals and targets spoken of in the *Local Food Act* will measure not just overall economic growth, but also consider the measurement of local



community resilience and economic development, the environmental impact of local food systems and the health outcomes for Ontarians in improving our local food systems. We appreciate that these goals will be published and the government will follow-up with a report on the degree to which they have been achieved. The inclusion of public metrics helps ensure action and achievement. We also hope that the government considers establishing an inter-ministry mechanism to ensure public policy and programming on food and farming coming from various government departments and agencies is better integrated and considers input from engaging a wide spectrum of stakeholders, from farmers to consumers.

While Sustain Ontario looks for the timely passage of the proposed *Local Food Act*, we feel the *Local Food Act* can and should do more than promote awareness and strive to improve procurement. We believe the key to really accomplishing the goals of stronger food systems in Ontario lies in improving the food literacy of all Ontarians. In the short term this means food awareness programs including nutrition and food preparation programming. A longer term investment includes a strong food literacy component in our school curriculum. We go as far as to suggest hands-on food skills training in our school system. Not only will food literacy programming strengthen our local food system but it will surely translate to a healthier population in the medium to long term. We have attached a backgrounder on this issue to this letter for your consideration.

Likewise, a *Local Food Act* should also address the very fundamental issue of food access – the ability of all Ontarians to procure nutritious and culturally acceptable food at all times. We recognize this is not a simple matter and perhaps not one that can easily be addressed in a *Local Food Act* but it is certainly one that looms large in any discussion of food and should be an integral part of any local food strategy going forward.

We also suggest that the focus of *Bill 36* and a subsequent local food strategy needs to encompass regional economic development opportunities. The *Local Food Act* needs to signal a commitment to social and economic benefits for communities all across Ontario. By recognizing the diversity and potential that Ontario's various regions hold, we are certain that we can further enhance the economic viability and resilience of Ontario's regional food and farming sectors.

We would also like to highlight the importance of including forest and freshwater foods in the definition of what is considered local food in Ontario. In particular for Aboriginal communities, these foods are a vital component of food security, provide an economic development opportunity and also support their cultural identity.

Finally, we feel that is important to emphasize that *Bill 36* can realize several environmental goals. Ideally, the *Local Food Act* would include measures to further incent producers and processors, distributors and retailers towards environmentally sustainable practices. Using strategies that encourage the food and agricultural sector to move towards balancing growth targets with sustainability metrics will ensure a food system designed for the long-term benefit of Ontarians and will support both climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Sustain Ontario believes that the Province of Ontario can be a world leader in developing a sustainable local food system that provides nutritious food to healthy Ontarians. There is much to be gained through an aggressive collective effort to make our food system a model for all to follow.

Respectfully,

Karen Hutchinson,
Caledon Countryside Alliance
Sustain Ontario Advisory Council Co-chair

Bryan Gilvesy,
YU Ranch, ALUS
Sustain Ontario Advisory Council Co-chair