



Submission to:

The Ontario Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

April 1st, 2014

On behalf of the members of Sustain Ontario, the alliance for healthy food and farming, we thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Ontario budget priorities for 2014-2015. We know that the Ontario government, like Sustain Ontario members, is committed to transforming the Ontario food system into one that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable and we are excited to work together to focus our collective resources strategically to make this happen.

Sustain Ontario is a cross-sectoral alliance that is working to create a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable. Sustain Ontario works collaboratively to connect members, showcase food systems innovations and champions, explore and research pressing issues in the food system, and advocate for a healthy and sustainable food system. With over 400 members representing Ontario's food and farming sectors, Sustain Ontario's reach is province-wide.

Over the past year, we have witnessed important new and expanded spending on key food systems issues including:

- The creation of a **Local Food Act and Fund**, committing \$30 million over three years to growing Ontario's food and agricultural sector and domestic markets;
- The extension of the **Regional Food Grant Program** including the **Broader Public Sector and Market Access Grant streams**, encouraging increased purchasing of Ontario-grown and processed foods by publicly funded institutions and wholesale markets;
- Advancing **Healthy Kids Panel** recommendations by announcing
 - An additional investment of \$3 million in funding for student nutrition programs across the province including those in First Nations' communities;
 - Dedicated funding towards the hiring of 14 food distribution and logistics co-ordinators across the province to bring healthy and, where possible, local food into Student Nutrition Programs;

- A *High School Grant Program*, dedicating \$2.2 Million towards improving student nutrition;
 - Investing in *Fresh from the Farm: Healthy fundraising for Ontario schools*.
 - Creating the *Healthy Kids Community Challenge*, investing a total of \$45 million across 30 communities to help children be more active, make healthy eating choices, and achieve other health gains;
 - Processes for including nutritional data on menus in Ontario, leading to the introduction of new legislation that would require establishments to post calorie counts on menus and reducing the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages aimed at kids;
 - New breastfeeding supports to help ensure that newborns can get the best start possible;
- Investing in access to fresh, Ontario produce in First Nations' communities by expanding the *Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program* by 2.2 million to reach over 37,000 children including over 6,600 Aboriginal children.

We are thrilled to see these advances in funding and programs and feel strongly that such measures will further our members' capacity to build and share solid, on-the-ground innovative solutions that build resilient and regenerative communities across the province.

We strongly encourage the Ontario Government to continue to invest in these and other programs that support healthy food systems in the province. We also feel that there are some budgetary measures that will strengthen these commitments. We urge the Ontario government to:

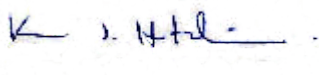
- Invest in further inter-ministerial communication and collaboration between food and farming-related ministries; we recognize the innovative work that is accomplished when ministry staff members work together across sectors;
- Consider aligning funding priorities and resources dedicated to food systems from diverse ministries (eg. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care);
- Continue to support local food and farming infrastructure that builds capacity for regional food systems and allows for more processing and distribution dollars to remain in Ontario;
- Grow the Local Food Fund and consider adjusting the parameters of the program to better suit all food systems players including civil society. Consider allowing for more flexibility in matching funds and staffing criteria, particularly for non-profits;

- Continue to invest in student nutrition programs across the province and build on the recommendations from the Healthy Kids Panel including the opportunity for supportive food literacy programming; continue to build capacity for these programs to expand their purchasing of local food;
- Invest in growing domestic and value-added markets, particularly niche markets and value chains such as organic, sustainable, pastured livestock, halal, gluten-free, world crops and forest and fresh-water foods that promote healthful and ecologically sound products and grow Ontario's regional economies;
- Support, recognize and reward ecological practices in agriculture: strengthen existing programs to prioritize ecological practices with the most regenerative impact for Ontario's natural resources and keep current with leading research and innovators;
- Work with the federal government to ensure that Growing Forward 2 programs meet the needs of **all** Ontario producers, processors and food entrepreneurs, with an eye to succession planning;
- Invest in transparent and regionally appropriate calculations of social assistance rates to include the cost of a nutritious food basket in all areas of the province, continuing to prioritize poverty reduction to ensure that everyone, regardless of income, can afford healthy food; and
- Invest in community food programs and centres that ensure access to fresh and affordable food to all Ontarians while building food skills and literacy.

2014 will be an important year for Ontario's food systems. Investments made now will have an impact for generations to come.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Karen Hutchinson



Bryan Gilvesy

Co-Chairs of the Sustain Ontario Advisory Council

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Sustain Ontario is a project of Tides Canada Initiatives Society (TCI). TCI is a shared administrative platform that provides professional organizational support (e.g. governance, financial management, HR, and regulatory compliance) to 40 social justice and environmental projects.

CC: Honourable Kathleen Wynne – Premier of Ontario, Minister of Agriculture and Food, and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Honourable Jeff Leal — Minister of Rural Affairs

Honourable Charles Sousa — Minister of Finance

Honourable Liz Sandals – Minister of Education

Honourable Teresa Piruzza — Minister of Children and Youth Services

Honourable Deb Matthews — Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Honourable Jim Bradley — Minister of the Environment

Honourable David Zimmer — Minister of Aboriginal Affairs

Honourable Ted McMeekin — Minister of Community and Social Services

Honourable Madeleine Meilleur — Attorney General

Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins — Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment

Honourable John Milloy — Minister of Government Services

Honourable Michael Chan — Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Honourable Bill Mauro—Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Honourable Yasir Naqvi—Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services

Honourable Kevin Flynn—Minister of Labour