



*the alliance for healthy food & farming*

# Theory of Change

Charting a Path to Healthy Food and Farming Systems

# Theory of Change

**NOVEMBER 2012**  
**SUSTAIN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION TEAM**

## **OVERVIEW**

This document describes how Sustain Ontario works to change Ontario's Food Systems. It documents:

- what issues Sustain Ontario is working to address,
- what Sustain Ontario's role is in addressing those issues,
- who Sustain Ontario works with,
- the outcomes that Sustain Ontario is aiming for,
- the strategies Sustain Ontario employs to obtain those outcomes
- the assumptions underlying this work

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# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT SUSTAIN ONTARIO

Sustain Ontario (SO) is a province-wide, cross-sectoral alliance that promotes healthy food and farming. SO takes a collaborative approach to research, policy development and action by addressing the intersecting issues related to healthy and local sustainable agriculture. SO is working towards a healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable food system for Ontario.

<b>Healthy</b>	Enhancing the health and well-being of people, other life forms, and the environments that they live, work, eat, learn and play in
<b>Ecological</b>	Minimizing practices that may adversely affect ecological systems and maximizing practices that build ecological health and resilience.
<b>Equitable</b>	Resulting in greater well-being and access to opportunity for all people
<b>Financially Viable</b>	Those working in food and farming enterprises are able earn sustainable livelihoods
<b>Food System</b>	Includes cultivated and non-cultivated food production and procurement, food processing, food distribution, food access, food consumption, farmland preservation and stewardship, food skills and education, and waste management <sup>1</sup>

SO is the outcome of a two-year process, led by the Metcalf Foundation, that brought together diverse groups and organizations working on food and agriculture issues in Southern Ontario. These groups and organizations represented health, community, farming and environment sectors. The Metcalf Foundation wanted to explore the appetite for cooperative, integrated work with the goal of transforming food and agriculture at a system-wide level. Through the process facilitated by the Metcalf Foundation, participants identified a need for collaborative policy and advocacy work at the provincial level. Food Connects Us All was published, exploring opportunities for collaborative, cross-sectoral work related to food and agriculture. The result was a proposal to the Metcalf Foundation requesting support for a provincial alliance that would research and develop policy

proposals related to healthy food and local sustainable farming. In January 2009, SO hired its first director. SO is currently working to expand its member base and develop research, policy and action priorities. The Metcalf Foundation continues to advise SO as the alliance takes root.

## ISSUE STATEMENT

There is a Good Food gap; many farmers find it difficult to make a living, it is difficult for eaters to make good food choices, and many aspects of our food and farming systems degrade ecological systems. All of this results in negative impacts on our economy, society, and health.

The Good Food gap exists because the Ontario food system is not structured to help us meet our goals as a society:

1. current policies and economic structures encourage farmers to grow commodities rather than food;
2. farmers receive very little of each food dollar;
3. food distribution, processing, and storage facilities do not meet the needs of small farmers,
4. in many low income and rural and remote communities residents cannot access healthy food;
5. food skills and knowledge have eroded;
6. our food system relies on imports and supports redundant trade;
7. some farming practices contribute to environmental degradation;
8. farming practices that benefit the environment are rarely rewarded economically;
9. urban sprawl is eroding quality farmland
10. new farmers find it difficult to afford land, in part because they are competing with developers
11. farmers are aging and farming has become an unappealing profession, in part, because farm incomes are low.

Good Food ideas that can improve the food system exist, but they are typically overlooked. Those developing and implementing solutions are identifying systemic problems that need to be fixed, to enable the transition to a healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable food system. The will, ability, and understanding necessary to address those systemic issues need to be developed and cultivated ,at all levels, in order to make change happen.

## SUSTAIN ONTARIO'S ROLE

The role of SO is to promote systems-level changes that will enable Good Food ideas – ideas contributing to the creation of a healthy, resilient and sustainable food system – to thrive. SO takes a collaborative approach to research, policy development and action.

Specifically, SO's role is to:

1. create a space (real and/or virtual) for developing linkages between groups and building capacity among them;
2. identify good food ideas that have the power to close the good food gap;
3. share those ideas so that others can adapt and adopt them;
4. identify barriers that inhibit widespread implementation of those ideas;
5. identify solutions to overcome those barriers;
6. work towards implementation of those solutions
7. build power to be able to push forward implementation; and
8. change views within society to expand support for systemic solutions to food system challenges.

## WHO SUSTAIN WORKS WITH

SO engages members, staff, interns, volunteers and other food system groups to undertake a number of activities that will enable it to fulfill its role.

Sustain Ontario Members are groups, organizations and businesses that work in the food and farming sector and are committed to creating a food system in Ontario that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable. Member groups include: groups that promote buying locally, food security organizations, anti-poverty groups concerned with food security, private catering companies and restaurants, environmental organizations that work with farmers or support local and organic food, research groups and institutions, educators, farmers, food distributors, input companies, institutional purchasers, food consultants, and many more.

Sustain Ontario also collaborates with non-member groups that are involved in the food system. These include a similar range of groups and organizations that may not share in all elements of the vision held by the Alliance or that may be unable for various reasons to become members. We collaborate with these groups in areas where we share common interests.

Action by SO does not require buy-in or support by all members. SO provides spaces for dialogue and work to build shared understanding. SO also provides a space where groups with common interests can take action together, even if the entire alliance is not

aligned, engaged, or supportive. However, action that some Alliance members believe will undermine their work cannot be supported within the Alliance.

Constellation working groups are self-organizing teams led by interested and engaged leaders. The structure enables emergent leaders to take initiative, and identify and work on strategic activities that harness converging “mutual self interest” as well as the expertise, time, and energy of groups of people within the network. Constellation working groups can develop their own terms of reference, and action plans, and decide who has the organizational capacity to be a financial lead if funding is required. The structure can hold many strategic planning and action teams – groupings that are linked via communications to ensure that they are benefiting the broader membership network and advancing the overarching issues. Participating organizations preserve their autonomy while working together on activities that reflect the larger networks goals.

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## DESIRED OUTCOMES

SO’s Outcomes Map (see Appendix 1) outlines the proposed path in which short-term outcomes (row 5 and 4) and medium-term outcomes (row 3 and 2) lead to the attainment of SO’s desired long-term outcomes (row 1).

## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Success for SO will look like constant change, both in policy and in practice on the ground; building towards a food system that fits SO’s vision of a healthy, ecological, equitable, and financially viable food system for Ontario. Specifically, SO’s long-term goals are to see that:

- 1) New laws, regulations and policies are enacted and implemented that reflect SO’s vision;
- 2) Ontario groups are adapting and adopting feasible, on-the-ground food system solutions, and innovations.

## SHORT-TERM AND MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

In order to achieve these long-term outcomes, a number of short-term and medium-term objectives have been developed. Overall, these objectives are to conduct, document and

provide access to research about Good Food ideas and innovations; increase knowledge, awareness and capacity of SO members and stakeholders regarding food system challenges; engage SO members and key stakeholders to work effectively together to solve food system challenges; and have decision-makers inside and outside of government consider the policy solutions developed by SO's members and key stakeholders.

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## STRATEGIES

SO will employ five key strategies to fulfill its role:

- 1) Network;
- 2) Showcase;
- 3) Examine and research;
- 4) Policy reform; and
- 5) Government relations.

A number of activities will be undertaken for each strategy, in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Each activity is expected to result in at least one of the outcomes outlined in the Outcomes Map (see Appendix 1). The links between SO's resources, strategies and activities, and desired outcomes is depicted in SO's Logic Model (see Appendix 2).

Note: The focus in all of these activities is to realize the SO vision in Ontario, but SO recognizes that many of these activities need to take place at other jurisdictional levels in order to realize the change that SO aims for; including municipal, regional, federal and international.

### STRATEGY #1: NETWORK

SO will engage those developing and implementing Good Food ideas; bridge silos and convene members of different sectors to discuss strategy and policy; link emerging leaders; support working groups; and develop sector capacity. It is believed that these network strategies will build capacity at the ground level to implement sustainable solutions; focus energy and expertise on solving food system challenges; and generate the collective power required to influence policy changes.

#### Strategy 1.1

Engage those working on food system change in formal, membership relationships.

Activities: Recruit and retain members by making membership meaningful and mutually beneficial.

Expected outcomes: A strong, inclusive and credible Alliance.

(See outcomes 5d and 4e on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 1.2

Convene those with shared interests in policy and practice in dialogue.

Activities: Host policy roundtables, strategy sessions, and on-line policy dialogue and consultation; document discussions and outcomes; host events and conferences.

Expected outcomes: The network articulates and advances effective policy and practice ideas. (See outcomes 3b, 3c, and 2a on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 1.3

Bring those working in common areas together physically and virtually to share ideas and resources; to create communities of practice; and to work collaboratively.

Activities: Hold events; convene working groups; host webinars.

Expected outcomes: Greater capacity on the ground to implement good food ideas; to identify barriers and solutions; and to advocate for implementation of solutions. (See outcomes 4a, 3d, 3e, 2c, and 1b on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 1.4

Build members skills to effectively implement food systems change.

Activities: host webinars, workshops, events, and provide access to training opportunities.

Expected outcomes: Increased skills to move good food ideas and policy changes forward. (See outcomes 1a, 1b, 2c, 3e on the outcomes map)

## STRATEGY #2: SHOWCASE

SO will develop case studies and document successes and challenges. It is believed that this will inspire replication and lead to the development of a more common vision of what a sustainable food system can look like.

### Strategy 2.1

Develop case studies and document innovations, successes and challenges – both within Ontario and outside – through various forms of media.

Activities: Document cases by developing video, info-graphics, profiles, papers and briefs; identify and build on policies implemented successfully in other places.

Expected outcomes: Greater understanding of the range of innovations, challenges and solutions. (See outcomes 5a, 4a, 3d, and 3e on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 2.2

Share food systems developments from both inside and outside Ontario through social media, conventional media, events and other approaches.

Activities: Host events; disseminate cases and developments via conventional and

social media.

Expected outcomes: Greater understanding of challenges and solutions and dissemination of good ideas; replication; a common vision of what a sustainable food system can look like. (See outcomes 4a, 4c, 4d, 3d, 3e, 1b on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 2.3

Inform network members, decision-makers, other key stakeholders and the public about food systems developments within and outside Ontario.

Activities: Events; conventional media; social media.

Expected outcomes: Ontario food system players are better informed and better able to act to change the food system and to develop feasible and effective solutions. (See outcomes 4d, 3d, 3e, and 2c on the outcomes map)

## STRATEGY #3: EXAMINE AND RESEARCH

SO will identify barriers that stand in the way of the application of Good Food ideas and seek solutions to remove those barriers.

### Strategy 3.1

Conduct embedded, participatory, cross-sectoral and academic research; identify barriers that inhibit the advancement of good food ideas; and seek solutions to those barriers.

Activities: Host webinars; engage in and support academic and community research partnerships; document barriers and solutions; host working groups and roundtable discussions.

Expected outcomes: Comprehensive understanding of issues and solutions; shared analysis and understanding of food system issues and solutions. (See outcomes 5d, 4a, 4d, 3b, 3d on the outcomes map)

## STRATEGY #4: POLICY REFORM

SO will create opportunities for dialogue about food policy within and beyond its diverse membership; develop policy papers and positions; and engage in advocacy. It is believed that this approach to policy reform will lead to changes in rules and resources that will support, rather than inhibit, the development of sustainable food systems. It is also believed that, for many of the food system challenges faced, there is a diversity of solutions and it is possible to support that diversity of solutions at a policy level.

### Strategy 4.1

Create and convene dialogue about food policy.

Activities: Host webinars; engage in and support academic and community research partnerships; document discussion and insights; host working groups and roundtable discussions.

Expected outcomes: Sustain Ontario members have greater capacity to engage in policy development and change (See outcome 4b on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 4.2

Develop policy papers and positions.

Activities: Define issues and frame practical policy solutions; review government and institutional priorities so that proposed solutions can be framed (where possible) as aligned with or helping advance those.

Expected outcomes: Effective, practical and politically feasible policy ideas will be developed and moved forward; changes in rules and resources support, rather than inhibit, sustainable food systems. (See outcomes 4b, 3c, 2a, 2b and 1a on the outcomes map)

### Strategy 4.3

Engage in advocacy.

Activities: Conduct campaigns; outreach to the public; monitor policy implementation to encourage follow-through.

Expected outcomes: SO's policy ideas will be well-received, supported and implemented by decision-makers. (See outcomes 2b and 1a on the outcomes map)

## STRATEGY #5: GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

SO will liaise with policy-makers and politicians to keep food system reform at the top of their minds, and to understand their priorities and the issues they are trying to address. SO will help them recognize how healthy food and sustainable agriculture can deliver solutions to a variety of complex social problems, reduce government costs stemming from the Good Food gap, and strengthen Ontario's economy. It is believed that this will facilitate policy reform.

### Strategy 5.1

Liaise with policy-makers and politicians to keep food system reform top of mind and to understand their priorities and the issues they are trying to address.

Activities: Meet with policy-makers and politicians and organize members to do the same; communicate with policy-makers and politicians through social media.

Expected outcomes: SO has positive working relationships with key decision-

makers and is viewed as credible; government policy-makers consider policy solutions promoted by SO and its members. (See outcomes 5d, 3a and 2b on the outcomes map)

## Strategy 5.2

Help policy-makers and politicians recognize how healthy food and sustainable agriculture can deliver solutions to a variety of complex social problems.

Activities: Meet with policy-makers and politicians and organize members to do the same; communicate with policy-makers and politicians through social media.

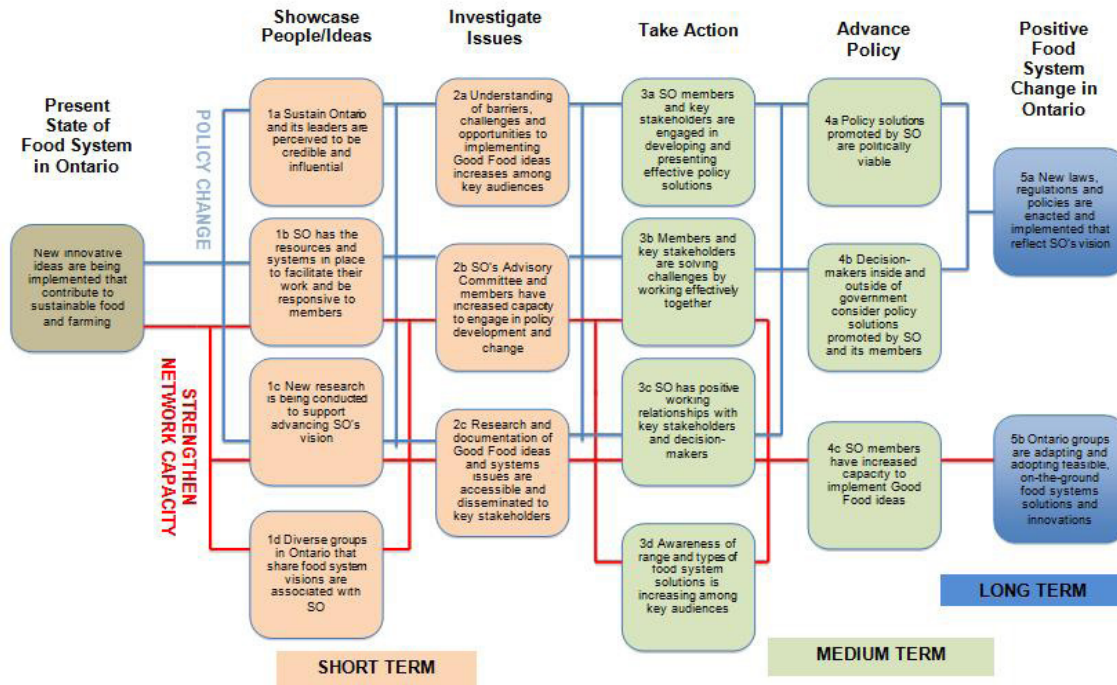
Expected outcomes: Policy reform contributes to the development of a sustainable food system. (See outcome 1a on the outcomes map)

## Assumptions

Assumptions underlying SO's approach include:

1. Food system knowledge and research grounded in experience is necessary for identifying problems and designing solutions.
  2. Multi-sectoral collaboration is required to achieve the systems changes necessary to resolve the farm income, health, and environmental crises.
  3. Cross-sectoral discussion has been limited to date, yet there appears to be a growing appetite to engage in discussion
  4. On-the-ground there is desire and energy for change.
  5. Members will initiate collaboration with other members or the development of working groups on specific projects .
  6. Solutions are emerging which can be shared, adapted, and scaled once networks are strengthened.
  7. Good ideas, when shared, will take root.
  8. Changing public opinion will lead to public support for policy change.
  9. Decision-makers are open to hearing good ideas.
  10. Some policy areas appear ripe for change.
  11. If the network is seen as credible we will be able to influence policy-making processes.
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# APPENDIX 1: OUTCOMES MAP



## **APPENDIX 2: LOGIC MODEL**

### **SUSTAIN ONTARIO LOGIC MODEL (DRAFT)**

Situation: There is a Good Food gap; many farmers find it difficult to make a living, it is difficult for eaters to make good food choices, and many aspects of our food and farming systems degrade ecological systems. All of this results in negative impacts on our economy, society, and health. Good Food ideas that can improve the food system exist, but they are typically overlooked. Those developing and implementing solutions are identifying systemic problems that need to be fixed, to enable the transition to a healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable food system. The will, ability, and understanding necessary to address those systemic issues need to be developed and cultivated, at all levels, in order to make change happen. The role of SO is to promote systems-level changes that will enable Good Food ideas – ideas contributing to the creation of a healthy, resilient and sustainable food system – to thrive.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Funding</li> <li>▪ Office space</li> <li>▪ Staff time</li> <li>▪ Intern and volunteer time</li> <li>▪ Advisory council time and perspectives</li> <li>▪ Member time and perspectives</li> <li>▪ Social capital and network</li> <li>▪ Ongoing research</li> </ul>	<p><b>Network:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruit and retain members by making membership meaningful and mutually beneficial</li> <li>▪ Host policy round tables and strategy sessions, and document discussions and outcomes</li> <li>▪ Host events and conferences</li> <li>▪ Convene working groups</li> <li>▪ Host webinars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Groups and individuals involved in food systems change</li> <li>▪ Groups and individuals that make up the food system</li> <li>▪ Decision-makers within government</li> <li>▪ Other decision-makers</li> <li>▪ People interested in the food system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 5d: SO and its leaders are perceived to be credible and influential</li> <li>▪ 4a: Barriers and challenges to implementing Good Food ideas are understood by stakeholders</li> <li>▪ 4e: Members are connecting with each other, getting to know each other and acting on those connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3b: Members and key stakeholders with an interest in food systems are solving challenges by working effectively together</li> <li>▪ 3c: SO members and alliances are engaged in developing effective policy solutions</li> <li>▪ 3d: Awareness of range and types of food system solutions is increasing among key audiences</li> <li>▪ 3e: Access to resources,</li> </ul>	
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>skills and other capacities increases for SO members</li> <li>▪ 2a: Policy solutions promoted by SO are politically viable</li> <li>▪ 2d: SO members have increased capacity to implement Good Food ideas</li> </ul>	

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
	<p>Showcase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document cases by developing video, infographics, profiles, papers and briefs</li> <li>Identify and build on policies implemented successfully in other places</li> <li>Host events</li> <li>Disseminate cases and developments via conventional and social media, and at hosted events</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5a: SO has the resources and systems in place to facilitate their work and be responsive to members</li> <li>4a: Barriers and challenges to implementing Good Food ideas are understood by stakeholders</li> <li>4c: Research and documentation of Good Food ideas and systems issues is accessible</li> <li>4d: Good Food ideas and innovations, and resources, are being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3d: Awareness of range and types of food systems solutions is increasing among key audiences</li> <li>3e: Access to resources, skills and other capacities increases for SO members</li> <li>2d: SO members have increased capacity to implement Good Food ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1b: Ontario groups are replicating feasible, on-the-ground food system solutions and innovating based on new understanding</li> </ul>
			disseminated through key networks		
	<p>Examine and research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host webinars</li> <li>Engage in and support academic and community research partnerships</li> <li>Document barriers and solutions</li> <li>Host working groups and roundtable discussions</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5c: New research is being conducted to support advancing SO's vision</li> <li>4a: Barriers and challenges to implementing Good Food ideas are understood by stakeholders</li> <li>4d: Good Food ideas and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3b: Members and key stakeholders with an interest in food systems are solving challenges by working effectively together</li> <li>3d: Awareness of range and types of food system solutions is increasing among key</li> </ul>	

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
	<p>Advance policy/policy reform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Host webinars</li> <li>▪ Engage in and support academic and community research partnerships</li> <li>▪ Document barriers and solutions</li> <li>▪ Host working groups and roundtable discussions</li> <li>▪ Define issues and frame practical policy solutions</li> <li>▪ Review government</li> </ul>		<p>and innovations, and resources, are being disseminated through key networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 4b: SO Advisory Council and members have increased capacity to engage in policy development and change</li> </ul>	<p>among key audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3c: SO members and alliances are engage in developing effective policy solutions</li> <li>▪ 2a: Policy solutions promoted by SO are politically viable</li> <li>▪ 2b: Policy-makers consider policy solutions promoted by SO and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1a: New laws, regulations and policies are enacted and implemented that reflect SO's vision</li> </ul>
	<p>priorities so that proposed solutions can be framed (where possible) as aligned with or helping advance those</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct campaigns</li> <li>▪ Outreach to the public</li> <li>▪ Monitor policy implementation to encourage follow-through</li> </ul>			<p>its members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2c: Decision-makers outside of government consider ideas and solutions promoted by SO and its members</li> </ul>	

Inputs	Outputs <i>Activities</i> <i>Participation</i>		Outcomes -- Impact <i>Short</i> <i>Medium</i> <i>Long</i>		
	<p>Government relations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meet with policy-makers and politicians and organize members to do the same</li> <li>▪ Communicate with policy-makers and politicians through social media</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 5d: SO and its leaders are perceived to be credible and influential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3a: SO has positive working relationships with Ontario groups who share interest and with key decision-makers</li> <li>▪ 2b: Policy-makers consider policy solutions promoted by SO and members</li> <li>▪ 2c: Decision-makers outside of government consider ideas and solutions promoted by SO and members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1a: New laws, regulations and policies are enacted and implemented that reflect SO's vision</li> </ul>



*Sustain Ontario is a project of Tides Canada Initiatives.*

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