



**Good Food has the power
to make change.**



Good Food and Farming Ideas for Ontario

Provincial Election 2018

Good Food has the power to make change. Consider adopting some of these Good Food and Farming ideas to support your platform this election.

Support Sustainable Local Food and Farm Enterprises

Purchasing local, sustainably-produced food helps keep family farms viable, and creates job in processing and distribution. Money spent on local food stays in the local economy, multiplying the impact. Standards for local food procurement can make local, healthy, sustainable food accessible to all. As buyers, public sector institutions can use their purchasing dollars strategically to support local, independently operated food infrastructure projects—including processing and distribution—during their start-up phases.

This will also support new and young farmers, who are more likely to start with smaller, direct-marketing operations, and scale into regional marketing—where they run into a barrier because this regional infrastructure is missing. There are also other tools to support new regional food infrastructure and farm enterprises, including positive examples of innovative financing policies from other provinces,¹ where tax breaks encourage people to invest in their communities!

1. Institute sustainable food procurement policies, and ensure that public dollars go to purchasing Ontario food and farm products

Enact Local Food Act targets. Specifically, require public sector organizations under provincial control (e.g. healthcare, child care, correctional services, schools, colleges/universities, long term care) to purchase 20% Ontario products, with incentives and supports to increase to 40% by 2022

2. Facilitate access to capital for provincial food and farming entrepreneurs

- a. Permit new vehicles for investment capital, such as a tax credit which allows ordinary people to move their RRSPs into a community project investment
- b. Commit Social Enterprise Strategy funds to support innovative and sustainable food enterprises
- c. Improve access to regional food infrastructure including incubation, aggregation, distribution, and processing (e.g. local abattoirs, food hubs): As with public roads, use public funds to invest in food infrastructure for long-term rural development goals

¹ See e.g. Nova Scotia's CEDIF <http://farmworks.ca/about/investment/>



Support Sustainable Farming: Enable Future Farmers and Preserve Farmland

Ontario has an aging farm population: 55% of farmers are over 55² and will be retiring in the next 15 years. At the same time, 91% of these farmers don't have a set plan on how they are going to transition their businesses, including \$135 Billion in assets³. This is an immediate threat to the industry. It is also an opportunity.

The opportunity will require support for new entrants. While the province supports new farmer training at post-secondary institutions, there is a clear demand for practical, hands-on training that receives no provincial support. New entrants also find the cost of farmland—which has more than doubled in most regions of the province in the last decade⁴—prohibitive.

To promote sustainable farming, we must incentivize farming practices that regenerate soil health and biodiversity, while conserving natural resources. We must also ensure that all viable farmland remains in production, and forests and freshwater food sources remain accessible.

1. Support Ontario's future farmers

- a. Provide stable core funding for existing and expanded on-farm training programs, providing apprenticeship and mentorship for new entrants and diversifying farms
- b. Inventory publically-owned farmland in the province, ensure that it is permanently protected for farming, and make it available to new graduates of farmer training programs
- c. Work with farmers to develop programs that provide long term access to farmland for new and young farmers working across a diversity of scales.

2. Support Farmland Preservation

Place strict controls on speculation in, and commodification of, Ontario farmland by prohibiting the acquisition or control of class 1-4 farmland in the province by non-farmer and/or absentee investors

3. Incentivize and support sustainable farming practices

Adopt a program that measures soil organic matter on farms in Ontario every three years, using a robust and consistent methodology. Tie these soil health indicators directly to financial instruments, such as farmland taxation rates⁵ and crop insurance subsidies⁶

² StatsCan CANSIM table 004-0239

³ StatsCan CANSIM tables 004-0245 and 002-0007

⁴ 2016 FCC Farmland Values Report

⁵ Dr. Ralph Martin, "A way to stop the decline of soil organic matter", Guelph Mercury Tribune <https://www.guelphmercury.com/opinion-story/8154610-a-way-to-stop-the-decline-of-soil-organic-matter/>

⁶ Report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario: Putting Soil Health First: A Climate-Smart Idea for Ontario.

Get Healthy Food into Schools and the Curriculum

Connecting children and youth with good food has tremendous potential to improve the future of our province. Educators all across the province know that children learn better when they are well nourished, not hungry. Providing kids with healthy and culturally appropriate food in schools and teaching them to grow, cook, eat and value healthy food can strengthen Ontario's economy and ensure Ontario's agricultural future, while playing a critical role in reducing chronic disease. Many educators have discovered that they can help children learn better when they integrate food into the curriculum. For example, food is a great tool to teach children about why environmental stewardship is important and how to be good stewards for a healthy planet.

Finally, community groups that are working to build safe, inclusive, and welcoming communities are using food programs based in schools to help newcomers and socially excluded or vulnerable groups to gain opportunities for healthy social interaction, relationship creation, and skill building. Good food can help connect all.

1. Establish a universal school nutrition program for all children and youth

Continue to support and expand the Ontario Student Nutrition Program to ensure that all Ontario schools run a Student Nutrition Program that is accessible to every child and youth, every school day.

2. Enable food literacy education for all students in grades K-12

Strengthen the conditions for food literacy to be taught as a mandatory part of the school curriculum. This will better enable students to learn about our food system and how to grow, prepare, preserve, and choose healthy and sustainably produced food. Opportunities include establishing and expanding school food granting programs, as well as supporting teacher training on how to use the curriculum to teach food literacy.

3. Engage School Boards in advancing good food in schools

Ask school boards to develop food literacy and student nutrition policies, and encourage them to support food literacy and student nutrition as elements of healthy school and well-being initiatives.

Support Community Growing

Urban agriculture is expanding rapidly on the roofs, public and private land in our towns and cities—including community gardens in urban and rural locations. Accessibility is an issue in urban growing spaces across the province. In some Municipalities, different interpretations of the standards make building or retrofitting community gardens prohibitively expensive. We need a provincial policy to act as a guiding standard, while providing meaningful opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities and other marginalized groups to participate—recognizing that one of the greatest barriers to community gardens today is ensuring they are barrier free.

Similarly, municipalities rely on provincial guidelines requiring soil tests that are prohibitively expensive on municipal lands--yet not required on private lands. Gold standards for soil testing are standing in the way of new community gardens.

1. **Establish community-led standards for accessibility**
Support and fund communities to develop practical accessibility standards for new or retrofitted community gardens, whether on public or private property.
2. **Help implement AODA standards**
Create a provincial fund to implement Accessibility of Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards for new or retrofitted community gardens.
3. **Support soil testing policies that enable community growing**
Develop and implement a process for soil testing with standards that create favourable conditions for the development of community gardens.

Enable all Ontarians to Access Healthy Food

Income is the root cause of household food insecurity. 1 out of every 8 households doesn't have enough income to cover rent, bills, and food. This affects working families (60% of food insecure households in Ontario have employment income) as well as those on social assistance (64% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance remain food insecure). 1 out of every 6 Ontario children live in a food insecure household.

Food insecurity takes a serious toll on people's health, and is closely associated with a greater reliance on healthcare. Income solutions such as a basic income guarantee, a living wage, and social assistance rates geared to the real cost of living are needed so that everyone has the money for basic needs, including food⁷.

1. **Set appropriate standards and gather evidence**
 - a. Develop and adopt transparent and regionally appropriate calculations of social assistance rates to include the cost of a nutritious food basket in all areas of the province
 - b. Commit to consistent participation in Household Food Security Survey Module of Canadian Community Health Survey, to provide evidence for policy on food insecurity.
2. **Prioritize poverty reduction**
 - a. Increase social assistance rates linked to the real cost of living, utilizing the recommendations from Income Security: Roadmap for Change report.
 - b. Continue and evaluate the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project.
 - c. Create policies that encourage good jobs with regular hours and benefits, including raising the minimum wage to \$15 / hour.
3. **Use healthy food to serve health needs**
Implement a program to provide fresh food prescriptions to people with chronic health issues, included in the pharmacare plan.

⁷ All information above from <https://www.odph.ca/centsless> and <http://proof.utoronto.ca/>



Bold Game Changer: The Ontario Food Policy Council

Establish a **Provincial Food Policy Council** with an independent budget, staff and decision-making power, that will connect the work of similar regional and municipal food policy councils⁸, indigenous councils and provincial food systems actors, with a mandate to support a National Food Policy Council.

This council, using the evidence-informed plan developed by the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy group⁹, would also support the planning, implementation and monitoring of programming across multiple ministries (Health, Education, Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, Environment, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Economic Development and Growth, Aboriginal Affairs, Energy) that work on interconnected food systems issues related to jobs, health, economic development and climate change.

⁸ Including Food Strategies, Roundtables, etc.

⁹ Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group. The Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy; 2017. Available from: <http://sustainontario.com/work/ofns/>



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Sustain Ontario is a province-wide, cross-sectoral alliance that is working toward a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable, and financially viable. Sustain Ontario is made up of members from across the province representing diverse sectors including farming and farmer training, education, health & nutrition, legal aid, service and retail. Visit <http://sustainontario.ca> for more information and to get in touch.