



January 24, 2011

## Financial Committee Pre-Budget Submission



# *Helping the Way Forward*

*A written submission from the Holland Marsh Growers' Association*



### *Executive Summary*

Former U.S. President Ronald Reagan once said, "Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it."



That, in a nut shell, is where farming in Ontario is at. Over the centuries, farming and food has long been known as the cornerstone of civilization – and more evidence is showing this belief to be true from ancient times until now. In a world with 195 countries (192 of them recognized by the United Nations), fully a quarter of them have (or continue to have) experienced food riots in the past three months. Escalating costs of food, food production, and food processing will drive up the retail prices for food for our fellow citizens – and yet, may ultimately lead to the demise of the farm and food sector in Ontario because it is not properly accorded the importance it should be as an economic driver by government, bureaucrats, residents, or (ironically) itself. While the Ministry of Finance report – Ontario's Long-Term Report on the Economy – argues that agriculture is important to the province and is the "economic backbone of many rural communities" (which should read ALL), when the rubber hits the road, there isn't a great amount of political will, strength, or that aforementioned "backbone" to deal with the real issues that will save Ontario farmers money before dealing with retailers and a public looking for the next big deal. In an era when Wal-Mart (America) announces that, as a major retailer, they agree that ALL citizens should have access to fresh fruits and vegetables and that this corporation will do everything it can to assist in the process of providing affordable health – this must be applauded. The unfortunate statement that goes with this is the following: Wal-Mart (America) also announced that it would lower the prices of fresh produce by a billion dollars a year annually.



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Who do you think shoulders the burden for the good of society?

Farming and food must develop, collectively, a long-term business plan in order to succeed. Yet, we continue to be, for the most part, a knee jerk, reactionary industry, bouncing from crisis to crisis – often created by those situated in a position best suited to resolve those issues. Where are the long-term strategic planning, the marketing and business plans, and even such a simple thing as a vision statement? A new attitude is needed – specifically one that affirms what many of us already know: this is a vibrant, exciting business desperately needing a focus rather than excuses. The Holland Marsh Growers' Association has members that are actively



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looking for new ways to handle production; new ways to add value to what they do; and new opportunities to move what it is they produce.



There is nothing wrong with that – except they are continually stymied by ineffective rules and regulations that were developed at the turn of the century – the 20<sup>th</sup> Century not this one which just saw its first decade pass us by with no further resolution to the problems that have plagued our sector (and industry) since the 1940s.. Times have changed and outdated and outmoded legislation has done nothing but keep farming, as a business, on the backburners of our society. As that urban-rural gap ever-expands, we, within this industry, need to adapt to those realities. Things are not going to go back to the 1860s or even the 1960s. That is why we are presenting the following – solutions to real time problems. We believe that these solutions are not just viable – but provide an opportunity for growth and expansion within our own domestic marketplace and beyond. These are a series of areas, mostly government related, that could see some significant gains for horticulture at a very reasonable or non-existent cost. These are merely points that could/would improve the overall business environment within the sector and spearhead change throughout the farming and food sector if allowed to play out.



In case there is some question as to the impact that agriculture has upon government and societal policies, the HMGA has, as was done last year, provided an extensive list of provincial ministries that impact directly, or indirectly, upon farming policy in the province.



Mostly, due to the severe inadequacies and greatly misunderstood capabilities of edible horticulture by government, this most important sector of the Ontario agricultural scene could disappear without so much as a going-away party. Government policies (both federal and provincial) have severely impeded the ability of farmers – one of the most trusted professions on this continent – to do their jobs. Now, not some time in the next decade, is the time for horticulture to go to the forefront of the industry and take its place as innovators and risk-takers.



More importantly, the Ontario government must come to the realization that this province, this nation, is one of the very few countries that is sustainable unto itself. Meaning, it needs to look at re-establishing agriculture as a vital ministry within the government and not something that gets token appreciation when a photo op is required. What is required, immediately, is a provincial policy dealing with farming, food, and agriculture – something that is sadly lacking throughout most of Canada and does not even exist at the federal level.

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## *Financial Committee submission*

From the first recorded history of man, there has been farming since it provided food – and civilization was developed because someone, not acknowledged in any history books, decided that planting and growing food was easier than running after the wild animals roaming the plains of north-east Africa. Cultivation practices followed and the first true profession and industry arose. Nearly 10,000 years later, our nomadic ways – something Carl Jung called the collective unconscious still exists – as evidenced in this society's ability to sprawl without control into areas that are necessary: in the case of this document, onto a finite resource, agricultural lands.

The Holland Marsh Growers' Association would like to suggest the following ways that the Ontario Government could move forward with the innovative and creative industry that is the farming and food world of this province.

### *1. Acceptance and Implementation of a Business Risk Management (BRM) program for the edible horticultural sector*

When the former Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (Leona Dombrowsky) gathered farm leaders together, she said that there was a need to speak with one voice when it came to the development and implementation of a BRM program for the province's exceptionally diverse farm community. Supply Managed (SM-5) seemed to have the situation well in hand, but that really left the other 220 crops or livestock raised, grown, and harvested in the province without much hope for a reasonable safety net. The acceptance by the government of a BRM program for the grains and oilseeds sector (and the subsequent recent announcement of its renewal) gave a strong indication that there was interest in pursuing new BRM programs for the rest of the industry – and the new Minister, Carol Mitchell, asked that the collective voice for these farmers (OASC – Ontario Agricultural Sustainable Committee) bring together their proposals. The edible horticulture side, led by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, presented a well-thought out, yet – tried and true program, a modified Self-Directed Risk Management program (SDRM-like). This program, with minimal cost compared to the multitude of others (approximately \$20-million), is the culmination of nearly a decade of effort by grassroot farmers from the fruit and vegetable industry to incorporate a program that involved both levels of government (federal and provincial) and the farmer. This program is also the easiest of all BRM program to implement and administer – a bonus in an era of increasingly difficult and administratively obtuse programming options.

The farmers of the Holland Marsh fully endorse this program – and what it will mean in terms of safety net programming for farmers who have been void of this type of program since the demise of the original pilot program a few years ago.

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## 2. *The Passage and Implementation of Bill 78 – Taxation Amendment Act (Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers)*



This is a bill that, despite it being a private members bill, will have a huge impact upon the farmers of the Holland Marsh (and throughout Ontario) because they are generous to a fault but tend to do these activities quietly, without much fanfare (although, there are farm organizations that tote the work done). Farmers in the Holland Marsh have been donating farm products for decades to help those individuals and families in the province who are, for whatever reason, unable to gain access to either fresh produce or need, through circumstances beyond their controls, to use the food bank system. Many detractors have indicated that this bill makes light of their efforts, but farmers would see huge taxation benefits doing something that comes to them naturally – giving back to our society.



Passage of this bill, through committee right now (awaiting third reading), would be an acknowledgement that farmers, indeed, often go above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to ensuring safe, nutritious products are available to all.



## 3. *A Rural Secretariat To Remove All Legislation from the List Below (Ministries) that Intersect with Farming and Food in the province*



The development of a Rural Secretariat may seem to be a redundant governmental agency (or body) but it would be vital to both the farming community and the rural countryside. Despite opinions to the contrary, there is a rural-urban divide and the development of a Rural Secretariat (one that reports directly to the Premier's office, independent of the rest of the ministries) would co-ordinate all of the legislation with an eye to determining impacts upon the rural and farming communities. This secretariat would review each and every piece of legislation, removing the silo mentalities that exist in the predominantly territorial ministries, and ensure that the potentially destructive legislation is examined for the real world impact it will have. Had that been the case in the past few years (decades even), any number of items of legislation that have been passed that have greatly impacted upon the farming community in ways not imagined would have been partially or even completely averted. Anything from the newly created Endangered Species (with its failure to acknowledge the existence – well known to rural Ontarians) to the Clean Water Act have created layers of unacknowledged red-tape and bureaucracy that continues to trip of farmers seeking to comply.



In addition, when there is legislation that could be a positive (think infrastructure dollars where no municipality in its right mind is going to send money destined for an arena or road to help farmers in its community leaving farmers out of the billions of dollars and/or the research investment in farming and food when the Premier's focus is solely on blackberries - and not the edible kind), this rural secretariat would be able to best direct the actions and perceived good as well.

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#### 4. *Understanding the farm perspective in dealing the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)*



Land use policy framework is an ever-evolving practice, established in the 1970s from the Agricultural Code of Practice (1976) and continuing through the Comprehensive Set of Policy Statements (1994) and into what exists now – the Provincial Policy Statements (of both 1997 and 2005). This review is critical at this junction of the province's growth – as projections forecasted for outlying decades of 2031 indicate millions more people will be living in Ontario, with greater land use and pressure and, the unfortunate result being the on-going disintegration of class (0) 1 – 4 lands used primarily for growing the food people need to eat.



Ontario and its citizens have forgotten that the food they consume does not, in fact, come from a grocery store, but rather from a farm – even if that farm is not within this country which is often the case at the moment. But provincial policy is not designed for situation's today, instead, its focus is meant for future projections. That being the case, there **MUST** be somewhere in the document that allows for the absolute protection of both the farmland growing our various crops and livestock – and the built in understanding that protecting the farmer will protect that farmland, with or without the legislative protection. Please remember that farmers are one of the few, if only ones, that, as small business enterprises and entrepreneurs, continue to re-invest in their facilities, their lands, upgrading their seed, their inputs – all with the focus being efficiencies for the next year. We do what ever good business should do, but doesn't, we re-invest back to make it more profitable for the tomorrow's to come.



That being said, what we find absent from this document is that protection of that farmland – and more importantly, the stick of government to wield and protect that farmland when it is threatened, encroached upon, or subject to the government ignoring its rules and regulations as so often happens, including the PPS, as was aptly demonstrated recently in the Holland Marsh and area.



It is from that farmer perspective that we address this review committee. The PPS document, at its core, is about land use compatibility issues and protecting a land base (as in the Greenbelt legislation). But what is missing the moment for the government to be able to define "agriculture" (what we, in the marsh call farming and food production), showing everyone – from citizens (consumers) to developers – that farming is recognized not for the pretty silos dotting the countryside, but rather the economic impact this vitally unique sector provides. What is missing was the opportunity to work with stakeholders to review legislation, from other ministries, that have direct and indirect impacts upon the farming and food sector by arriving at definitions that allow for specific usages under such existing terms as "agriculture-related". That would have allowed for agri-tourism, value-added, on-farm diversification – and a whole host of "permissions" based upon the unique requirements of the farming community.

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There was a role within this document for developing and supporting local and regional food systems – whether it be distribution hubs (as is being proposed by the HMGA in another project) or the various municipalities throughout the province actively engaging grassroots’ participation to find ways to enhance, even increase, sustainability for its farming community. The PPS, after all, is intended to cover off the ENTIRE province, not just the areas in and around Toronto. This policy needs to have an impact in Rainy River, Thunder Bay, North Bay, or Moose Factory to Hawkesbury, Smith Falls, Courtright, or Oxley. It’s not just a Golden Triangle or selected parts of the Greenbelt – despite the location of the Holland Marsh as being in both.

The PPS could have dealt with the numerous nuisance suits faced by farmers in this province each and every year by determining proper policy on the impacts of urbanization within a farming community. Existing agricultural operations, whether it be the 100-year-old hog operation in Waterloo Region forced to close down because the Bay Street lawyer who moved into the premise beside, aware that this century-old hog operation was there, suddenly awoke one morning realizing that the smells of the farm and the noises heard during its various activities was interrupting his “quality of life” and his media-driven understanding of Green Acres and beyond.

Where policies established about buffering zones that took into account the urban infringement rather than just the view of the rural or farming perspective (the farming community has loads of buffering ideas, from MDS to strips so many metres (miles) from water sources). Where policies looked at the existing usage and took that into account before allowing for usages that are clearly not in permissible (read into this statement what you want, owing to the peaker plant facility constructed on a flood plain, in a food producing area, in contravention of dozens of regulations). Where such newly allowed facilities are not impacting on the agricultural/farming operation because this policy would allow proper berming, buffering, or land use controls that do not impede the day-to-day farming practices.

Finally, the HMGA, having already gone through Ontario Municipal Board hearings, is asking for only one thing: live up to the words of the policy either as it is written or as it altered with revisions. Rules were meant for all, including the government, and there can no longer be two standards, two sets of rules for the citizens of this province to abide by – one for them and another for the government itself. This document could do much to promote sustainable, smart growth that looks at the realistic expectations of individuals (citizens) and corporations well into the future. It could incorporate environmental conditions that need to be adhered towards; views of water and farmland usage that is in sync with the realities of an ever-changing landscape of climatic extremes. It could be used to address the question of using brown and grey fields, areas where manufacturing previously existed but now are abandoned with no hope of employment returning. Convert those into housing, infill as required, and work upwards – not outwards.

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We would hope that such a document, advocating the absolute respect of the land – and guiding future engineers and developers through the quasi-juridical minefield of differing, often contradicting, legislation – could be used as a proactive tool for smart growth in this province instead of always being reactive to the situation that already arose due to incompetence, neglect, or something far worse. Rules were made to be followed, even enforced – not to be bent or broken whenever the whim of government or strongly financed developers are able to do so by loosely interpreted or poorly written policy comes out. Strengthen it, favour the farming side so that our future generations can enjoy the same luxury of eating as we have, and ensure that farmers – the key landowners in the province with the most at stake – are brought forward in consultation of future endeavours and land use policy discussion through traditional forms of communication, not via the internet or a hidden announcement. Their input on these matters is more prevalent today than ever before.

##### *5. A definition of farming and food that is applicable to all ministries*

One of the biggest challenges facing farming today is the myriad definitions being used by various ministries to define what, exactly is agriculture. Or, more specifically, what is farming. Despite hysterics to the contrary (“The only way to be sure you eat safe food is if you go into the wilderness areas of Canada . . .”), the food we eat is certainly healthy.

Currently, there are more than a dozen different definitions for the provincial government and its various ministries. The definition of farming and food will encompass everything from food production to biomass and anything done (agriculture, at its base, is defined as the production of food and goods through farming). Discussions surrounding production, like the one in the City of Markham over the year were derailed when what appeared to be a relatively sane individuals, stood up and added comments to the discussion along the lines of, “if those damn farmers would stop farming and grow food, we'd be better off!”. Those conversations would not be eliminated but would be muted to background chatter.

As well, a clear definition would resolve outstanding municipal discussions (what is a greenhouse?), value-added and value-retention should be included (storing an apple or carrot is the same as grain), and MPAC would no longer be able to pick at pieces of the property in the hopes of getting more money through taxation. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has advocated for a definition change – and while the Holland Marsh Growers’ Association sees merit in it, clearly it does not go far enough. Value-added is a requirement for today’s sectors because of the ever-changing demands of consumers and retailers. Taxing the farmer or worse, classifying the farm operation as commercial/industrial does a huge disservice to the integrity of the farmers eking a living from the countryside.

The reason why the Holland Marsh Growers’ Association would differ with the OFA is because of the value associated with a farmer - \$7,000 Gross Annual Sales.



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Hitting this landmark figure allows an individual, any individual, to qualify as a farmer, get a General Farm Organization (a farm business registration number) and qualify for the exemptions that real farmers have worked hard to use. Farm vehicles, used in the backroads and countryside, are designed sturdy for a reason. However, we believe that this right, to being a farmer, is being abused by those who would consider what they do to be a hobby – or worse, a tax right off for their real jobs as corporate denizens in Toronto, trading off the higher taxes of one area to garner greater return from the lower end.

Were the bar for a farmer set at even the line of poverty rates in Ontario (which ranges from \$18,849 for a single person to \$35,471 for a couple with two children), this would have both a dramatic impact on the real figures associated with “agriculture” in the province as well as garner a huge return on taxation back towards the province. This one simple, dramatic action would strengthen, not weaken, the farm and food industry in the Ontario and lead to a more clearly defined, streamlined sector and contributor to the economy.

#### 6. *A Provincial-Wide Food Policy*

This would unite both farmers and urbanites within the context of food, a human necessity. Both British Columbia and Quebec have similar programs but nothing that could be shaped within the entire system. There are many examples provincially that have started – but none for Ontario, the most diverse province in the entire country. A food policy strategy would look at the realistic expectations of food production in this province, the lack of food processing facilities, and the beginning of an economic recovery based in both the urban and rural areas regarding food and food production.

In addition, it is time to bring everyone into the discussion because everyone does have a stake in food and food production. The time has come for the development of a provincial food policy council, with stakeholders throughout the entire system, to assist the silo mentality government ministries understand that growing food crosses multiple yet unrelated areas, like health, environment, economic (even international) development . . . the list is below.

It goes without saying but this is clearly as non-partisan an issue as you can find. Consumers, voters, are turning onto the idea of local food (even if that definition differs from person to person) – and they want a say in what they are now consuming.

We, as a developed society, are so well off that we assume the right to question our food, where it comes from, even the manner in which it is grown and harvested. What a luxury, considering the billions around the world who go to sleep hungry every night because their nation(s) is unable to either grow its own food for its citizens or distribute it properly and without political/ethnic chaos. Anybody wanting to go completely organic, hop into the next time machine to 1910. Enjoy





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the lifespan (approximately 47 years), the death from whatever bug happened to be passing through your community, the limitations in food production, and the begrudging fact that food being eaten may, indeed, be unsafe – but for other reasons. There are too many reasons to list for the reasons why imports have become so prevalent within our society - but the top and best answer is price, which Ontario farmers cannot possibly begin to offer similar, comparable cost of production to, say a farmer in an underdeveloped country paid less than a dollar a day. We've done pretty good to get where we are – but on the whole, we can do much better. If you want safe, nutritious, and healthy food: buy local, buy provincial, and buy Canadian. Get to know your local farmer (before they sell out to a developer because their livelihood no longer comes from selling and marketing a crop but the equity in a five-generation property); ask about how something is grown; look at websites such as [www.vhqfoods.ca](http://www.vhqfoods.ca) to learn what is INSIDE produce and not the miniscule “toxins” on the outside; or better yet, try growing it yourself.

This, after all, is food policy at its base.

### *7. Societal good in exchange for service and fees*

The Premier once challenged the farming and food sectors to arrive at a solution to the increase in minimum wage – which, ironically, makes us the number one jurisdiction in North America and will likely remain so. Minimum wage is a social issue. The Premier's Green Energy Act has, as well, been turned into a social issue – rather than just about power generation, it is the conversion of an entire society into a “greener” mentality.

And that is the link for farmers.

Proposal: since green energy is now a social issue, counter the minimum wage under the guise of an energy deal. Put all farm operations (only) onto the smart meter system (at no cost to farmers). Set the established rate (since it is computerized) to 2.2 - 4.1 cents per kilowatt hour cost for farmers, year round, for five years to establish real guidelines as to energy usage. Conduct energy audits (at the cost of the government) to all farm operations. Only those farms with a farm operation number qualify. No main house. Power usage will also be monitored for all farm employee residents as well, since that is part of the farm operation as well. This is a fundamentally sound, no cost program that can be run through Hydro One rather than the “municipalities”.

The Holland Marsh Growers' Association also supports the indictment by the OFA that more could be done on the farm level to recognize the value provided by the province's largest land-owner base – the farming community – and our enhancing of the environment. Farmers provide benefits to the public in providing food safety systems, environmental stewardship initiatives, protection of habitat, and preservation of the rural landscape.



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There is a pilot project operating in Norfolk County (ALUS – Alternative Land Use Services) that provides value to farmers, benefits to society, and a huge boon to the environment – a win-win-win situation in a time when climate change and radical environmental aspects are taking place in other countries.

This is the final budget before the next election – and it would behoove government to put into place an expansion of funding for the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP – run in conjunction with the federal government), stewardship programs (like Norfolk County or as Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority did with the Holland Marsh Growers' Association), as well as a stakeholder advisory board so that new initiatives can be reviewed to see the merit and value of proposed projects that could, in essence, benefit farmers, environment, and society. This is the root of an ecological goods and services program – something missing in the urban mentality when they are benefiting from such ground-breaking legislation as the Greenbelt Act.

#### 8. *Enhanced Foodland Ontario Funding*

Every year, it seems farm organizations in the province need to ask government that the program funding for Foodland Ontario remain but this year, during the “transition” to its new look (this past summer), it was noticeable from a farmer perspective, particularly on the farm gate retail marketplaces, that without this constant reminder of what’s available, consumers were just not visiting. It is the one sure fire program that seems to resonate with consumers, assist retailers in moving “local” Ontario product, and provide marketing value to farmers at minimal cost.

#### 9. *Reduction of Regulatory Red Tape*

The number one killer of creative, innovative concepts from the farming community is the red tape syndrome, synonymous with ministry bureaucrats not talking with each other. In the farming community, you need permits for virtually everything – from water to signage (linked to direct consumers) and everything in between. In a recent, new venture, a young farmer was pulled over driving a tractor, pulling farm implement equipment and told, in order, that this was not acceptable, was against the law, required a class A licence, was “too cheap” to afford proper equipment for farming (the fact that he was pulled over driving and pulling nearly a million dollars in equipment seemed to escape the MTO officer), and was going to court. Overzealous? It is far worse, because the young farmer was moving the equipment from one farm operation down the road, within the Holland Marsh, less than 200 yards, to the close-by but not adjoining second farm property.

MOE officers calling muck soils (the Holland Marsh is organic-based, rich, and swampy) washed off food products “toxic sludge”; the list is virtually endless as our governments (from all levels) continue to pile on more regulations in the hopes of . . .? Enough said. Ontario is not Open for Business when that business is strangled by red tape issues not comprehended by the various governmental ministries nor



acknowledged by farm leadership with agendas that differ from the grass root farming communities throughout the province.



On the topic of red tape regulations, the Holland Marsh Growers' Association would also bring to the attention of finance that food tenders never seem to make their way to the farming and food communities. Buying from the province, even the second products that end up in our provincially run jails, would be a beneficial to area farmers, remove waste (either composted or shipped), and allow for movement of "imperfect" yet completely safe, nutritious, and edible products to find their way into the food system. It is difficult to grasp that a government so firmly committed to eating local, buying local food, making the "vague" connection to health and its benefits, would still be using foreign sourced companies, in long-term, virtually unbreakable tendered contracts, in this day and age. Again, a red tape issue that even the Speaker of the Legislature was unable to end.



On a final note, the red tape surrounding the selling of fruit wines is again being raised – although there is no hope of legislation allowing for its selling at farmers' markets this season. However, it should be noted that the prohibition of fruit wines at any number of venues, least of which being the farmers' markets, is problematic with the Open for Business concept being touted by government at this time. At the very least, a test pilot involving a dozen fruit wine farmers, 50 or so LCBO stores, and more than 20 varieties should be undertaken from the May long-weekend until the Labour Day weekend to gauge consumer response, reaction, and sales.



#### *10. Education, consumer involvement, and the Buy Local movement*



A major emphasis needs to be placed upon the education of consumers regarding food and food options, particularly at the primary education system level. Why? then you are developing, from youth, a lifelong consumer, eating healthy, following a regiment that will relieve our healthcare system - a proactive approach to what we do. From the groundwork on the education side, then you would see the implementation of buy local policies within the institutions; greater interest in farming as a CAREER rather than a lifestyle (they are both); fundamental shifts in rural/urban planning (because more urbanites would see the merit and value of changing career paths from, say teaching [12,000 graduates for less than 5,000 positions], nursing [decreasing numbers, increasing graduates], etc, etc.). It makes people keenly aware that farming and food has a priority within the economic, environmental, health, and technological era.



This would allow for a number of initiatives being proposed by other like-minded urban organizations, such as:

- Plant urban Ontario
- Implementation of a school food program (akin to the one run by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association in the Northern School program), while embedding food literacy (Home Ec.) in the curriculum

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- Ensure food security for all communities, while recognizing the link between good food and good health
- Expand public procurement of local, sustainable food produced in Ontario
- Establish local food infrastructure through regional food clusters, including a proposal that the Holland Marsh Growers' Association has written regarding the need for a regional distribution centre

On that final note, the association, in the course of conversations with many within the end user supply chain (ie. foodservice, restaurants), has noted that there are two things that bother them most – first, how can one be assured of locally grown food and second, who grew it (if you can't confirm the first). A regional / local distribution hub is the start of something different – moving away from the whole concept of a centralized (read here retailer) distribution centre (D.C.). Another problem is access to various products – always an issue. The Ontario Food Terminal no longer services “Ontario” instead, its use itself as an international, globalized venue.

What is required is a one-stop shop for both produce and meats - and that is what is being proposed. The Holland Marsh Growers' Association is working towards building farmer and farmer product capacity for the development of a Regional Distribution. The HMGA believes that such a project would not only benefit farmers in the entire 100-kilometre radius by developing a sustainable market for their product but lead to the creation of new jobs at the facility and build into the long-term goal of sustainable agriculture in the area. Food product would be in three sub-sections – organic, Local Food Plus (LFP) certified, and conventional. In discussions, it would seem that a computer program indicating availability, how much, and delivery could be used and utilized to ensure proper ordering.

The goal of such a program/individual is to bring more farmers into the LFP process since the Holland Marsh Growers' Association has already begun the process. As indicated, this is about capacity building of farmers and farmer products and not restricted to crop or livestock raised or grown. It is about ensuring that farmers have a secure marketplace for their products, even growing the diversity and product of these farmers due to these new markets, and channeling, through a new distribution centre, these products to new venues in and around Ontario.

It is this process that most folks are seeking – the assurance that the food is not being shipped in from out of the area, repackaged, and then sold as local. This program would build consumer confidence in locally grown, locally raised farmer product, build upon the efforts of the Holland Marsh Growers' Association to bring awareness, education, and promotion to our products, and establish the foundation for a long-term regional distribution centre for food and food products. It is very ambitious – but starts with getting farmer involvement, build the product capacity, and via the certification program, ensure that local farmers are doing the right “thing”.

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This project is about multiple partnerships, ranging anywhere from the Royal, government, farmers, end users, consumers, not-for-profits – and could be used as a template for future “regional” food hubs. So many buy local groups and organizations are popping up with maps or locations - but can’t seem to grasp the concept of farmers working together towards a venture like this.

Finally, the Holland Marsh Growers’ Association is calling upon the government to put out a seed money program to assist the ever-growing number of “Buy Local” organizations so that their message, directly specifically at regions, such as Waterloo, Wellington County, Huron-Bruce, etc. is in somewhat co-ordinated. Each group suffers from a lack of funding to bring together a proper program that could work in conjunction, even hand-in-hand, with such government ideals as Foodland Ontario or Savour Ontario. Including these groups that are seeking a better for their local citizens and farmers is a societal good that benefits everyone – but on a regional basis.

### *11. Agricultural research and innovation*

Over the past few decades, virtually all research and extension field work disappeared from the Ontario countryside – deemed an unnecessary tax dollar usage. Right or wrong, these investments by government in both people and the industry have disappeared – but perhaps there is an opportunity to come forward with something far more progressive. The Holland Marsh Growers’ Association is in the process of developing such an extension program for presentation to the Minister in the next couple of months.

The reason why? Agriculture has always been on the cutting edge of technology – despite its aging population – because there tends to be movement towards new “tools” that can assist farmers in the field. GPS – global positioning – was being used by farmers years before the technology found any useful application in today’s modern transportation. Same applies to a number of engineered products – GMOs, nutrient products, plant breeding; all are done with incredible science backed behind it. Agree or disagree, it can be successfully argued that genetic manipulation has been taking place since Austrian monk Gregor Mendel.

There has never been a better time to return a scientific “team” back into the field with the latest technology and the skills to handle it. Making agriculture “sexy” could lead to the return of youth into the industry again – only this time, it won’t be generational but rather, interested parties.

Anticipating challenges in agriculture, and specifically horticulture, requires insight that is only gained by increasing staff at the field level – something that has, for decades, been eradicated to the point where there is no longer reliable field technicians – and the understanding from industry that problems, real or otherwise, need to be relayed to the government through appropriate channels instead of voicing discontentment without the expectation of results. This is the generation –

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the techno generation – who will twitter, google, search, and e-mail advances from field to field. And this is transferable knowledge, something that can aid now and into the future. The next successful food-based product, like a canola, will come from the minds of Canadians – it should be from Ontario with its diversity in production and climate.

## Conclusion

At some point, whether it is due to a pandemic crisis or something else other than that, our borders will close, both ways, for food import and export. Ontarians will still require food. There are only four things human beings require: air – you can last three minutes without it and while we are polluting our air, no one is dying of asphyxiation; water – you can survive three days without water, and while we are polluting our water, no one is dying of thirst; food – you can survive three weeks without food and while there is hunger, no one is dying in Ontario of starvation to a large extent; and shelter – in this country and province, one can live without shelter for about three months depending upon the season, obviously.

But, with Ontario being a net IMPORTER of food, it beckons the question, when the borders are closed, when the countries whose names we can't pronounce stop shipping their cheaply produced food to us in order to feed their own citizens, what will we eat? A country, a province, even a region (as is being discussed at municipalities throughout southern Ontario) that cannot feed itself, cannot be considered a country – yet the entire Canadian food system is churning down to less than one per cent of the population that is still around to ensure that there is food for 33-million (nearly 14-million in Ontario) residents. That's farmers, primary farmers – and the more than 730,000 jobs in the food sector that depend upon these farmers are also put into jeopardy. It is, as was discussed by OASC, a \$22-billion plus industry. The Holland Marsh farmers contribute directly more than \$169-million to the provincial coffers and that does not include the myriad extensions from farming being added in.

All of this evolves to this – while many provinces have developed localized, provincial campaigns (in Ontario, there is the Foodland Ontario logo, the Savour Ontario campaign, others include Buy Nova Scotia, etc.,) these are very limited in their financing and their scope. Expansion of these programs, using a partnership with the federal and provincial governments would do a number of things beneficial to society as a whole.

First, it would inform consumers of the value of eating healthy – thus reducing healthcare costs through dietary measures, a pro-active approach to our ever-increasing obese society. Second, it would assist in recapturing market share from imported products in an increasingly monopolized retail sector. Third, improving the economic conditions that could be measured for farmers gaining new/old markets would improve the overall economics in the countryside – with the idea being that boosting margins for farmers means passing along that wealth throughout





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the value-chain. There must be some recognition that agriculture, specifically farming, can be considered the backbone of the rural economy and thus bolster the fallen segments surrounding the massive manufacturing failures throughout Ontario. Agriculture – albeit now less than what it once was – can be used both domestically and through exportation to improve this province’s positioning beyond basic resources and financial institutions found on Bay Street or in the Toronto core. Yet, most of the value-added, sustainable products are not being given the same consideration as other sectors, such as technology (think Blackberry from RIM instead of blackberries for enhanced anti-oxidants aimed at reducing obesity and cancer in our fellow citizens).

Finally, all of the efforts above could be dove-tailed into the development of a new rural secretariat which would ensure that legislation garnered at urbanites but having little or no real impact are reviewed so that the best intentioned rules and regulations impacting the rural countryside is, at least, abated somewhat, there devastating impacts – both socially and economically – dimmed in response to outside stimulus. Maybe the time for a local procurement program is ready for Ontarians – even, beyond the Foodland Ontario, a labeling policy reaching into the upper echelons of the federal government that provides our fellow citizens with real, concrete answers to where their food comes from. “Product of Canada” pineapples is no longer acceptable to a nation that knows its food is coming from somewhere else, with conditions that are not applicable or acceptable in this land, and whose content is, at best, questionable.

Adding to this agriculture’s marketability is the importance of farming and environment – especially key during this time. Farmers are the stewards of the land – an old phrase, but one more appropriate today than ever before. With the majority of the province’s population now three generations removed from farming, it is vital to show the true value farmers bring to both Ontario and nationally. Do that through the environment. Build upon the concept that farmers provide more than food – they are conservationists, protectors of the land for future generations, returning enriched oxygen to a carbon-filled atmosphere. Link the progress of farmers in ensuring that their environmental good is at the forefront of a society being traumatized by daily media reports on global warming. Farmers are making contributions towards energy, biomass conversion, protecting water sources, developing environmental farm plans that showcase and highlight the conservationist nature of the industry, while, at the same time, providing food and fiber. Farmers are contributing to the construction of new, eco-friendly automobiles. It should be noted about things like the hemp industry’s inroads into developing panels for the interior of cars; ethanol production that is sprouting up throughout rural Ontario; and wind generation units and geo-thermal energy as alternatives to fossil fuels and coal-burning electricity.

Farmers are doing it all – and it needs to be marketed as such.

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By linking marketing, development, environment, and a program that ensures farmers of today are able to look at handing off their operations to future generation, agriculture will survive, thrive, and prosper. That is not the case right now. Sadly, the farming and food industry is unable to get that message out without partners. On its own, each farm is an entrepreneurial effort. Collectively, farming and food becomes the number one economic driver in this province, providing more than 730,000 jobs. Again, a message lost in the chaos of day-to-day life.

Helping farmer-driven organizations, like the Holland Marsh Growers' Association, gain access to new marketplaces should be the corner-stone of all governments – both federal and provincially – and the push should be from the ground up with assistance from farm organizations that are progressive enough to see value in making sure that their farmers are profitable. Those two words, farming and profit, should be allowed to co-exist in the same sentence without being viewed as a bad thing.

Finally, if local consumption starts from the top down, more and more of our citizens will begin to see the value our province can provide – not just from agriculture but also from all economic sectors.

Our organization wants to work with you and government to resolve these issues. We, at the Holland Marsh Growers' Association want to ensure that our area, our farmers, and our fellow fruit and vegetable brethren throughout Ontario and beyond have access to programs that provide a societal good: feeding our fellow citizens. It is what we, as farmers do best – and your government should respect our efforts to provide safe, healthy, and nutritious food products to a nation that is not even aware how their food is produced.

Throughout civilization's rise, the backbone, the root, has been agriculture. Cultures have risen and fallen around the availability of its food supply. Now, Canadian agriculture is the future for improved health and longevity of its citizens. Making farmers the endangered species they have become is the same as throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

It has future costs that cannot be determined – until it is too late.

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First, it must be acknowledged that farming and food, agriculture if you will, co-exists under the realm of a minimum of 20 ministries either directly or indirectly, making it the only sector able to work under such a heavy governmental regime.



#### Ontario Ministries – Impacting Agriculture

Premier – Dalton McGuinty  
 Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs – Carol Mitchell  
 Minister of Education – Leona Dombrowsky  
 Minister of Health Promotions – Margaret Best  
 Attorney General – Chris Bentley  
 Minister of Transportation – Kathleen Wynne  
 Minister of Natural Resources – Linda Jeffrey  
 Minister of Health – Deb Matthews  
 Minister of Citizenship and Immigration – Eric Hoskins  
 Minister of Labour – Charles Sousa  
 Minister of Environment – John Wilkinson  
 Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities – John Milloy  
 Minister of Research and Innovation – Glen Murray  
 Minister of Economic Development and Trade – Sandra Pupatello  
 Minister of Energy and Infrastructure – Brad Duguid  
 Minister of Infrastructure – Bob Chiarelli  
 Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Rick Bartolucci  
 Minister of Revenue – Sophia Aggelontis



#### *Proximity due to issues:*

Minister Responsible for Seniors – Gerry Phillips  
 Minister of Finance – Dwight Duncan  
 Minister of Tourism – Michael Chan  
 Minister of Consumer Services – John Gerretsen  
 Minister of Community and Social Services – Madeline Meilleur



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