

Local Food Background Guide

"Wherever food markets survive, they bring a quality to urban life that is all too rare in the West: a sense of belonging, engagement, character."

- Carolyn Steel

There is currently a strong demand for locally grown and raised food. To date, consumers have primarily been leading the march towards more localized food systems, but now public and private institutions are starting to demand local products as well. The workshop on April 20th will be an opportunity to discuss how each member of the food value chain can help address the disconnect between the demand and supply of local, Ontario foods. The following document provides a brief background on local food and what will be expected of participants at the workshop.

What is Local Food? Local food is food that is grown, raised, processed, and consumed in Ontario. Buying local food has positive environmental impacts, and has beneficial social and economic impacts in local communities. More specifically, buying local food reduces green-house gas emissions, increases income for rural farmers, revitalizes rural communities, and improves nutritional content of some foods. Our current food system is exporting the economic and social advantage of growing good food to those who grow it for us abroad. Relying on more local food would allow us to capture those missed social and economic benefits and it would diminish the environmental consequences of the current system.

What Local Food is Not Buying local- doesn't mean local food across the board. Being able to savour bananas, coffee, and chocolate in Ontario are some of the greatest successes of our global food system. Not everything can grow in Ontario and these imported foods have a place in our lives. Where we should put our effort is into sourcing more of what can grow *in Ontario from Ontario*.

Why is Local Food important? There is a bounty of good reasons for increasing local food procurement. The first good reason is that food prices are projected to rise by 5-7% this year. Food prices are closely linked to the cost of fuel. As the cost of fuel rises, local food increasingly makes economical and environmental sense. The second good reason to buy local is that Canada is facing a farm crisis. Farm incomes are declining and the average age of farmers is rising. We are sending our food dollars south and overseas. This creates a disincentive for the next generation of farmers to take over the fields. As a result, Canada is losing a part of its heritage and its ability to feed itself. A third good reason is that a strong, consistent supply of local food increases traceability in the food system.

Healthcare should be a leader. Public funds should be used for public benefit. Healthcare facilities could multiply the benefit of their spending through more strategic procurement. Increased spending on local food supports an agricultural sector in need. In addition, it has been shown that food dollars directed at rural farmers stay in local communities. As a result, supporting local food can strengthen regional food systems, revive Ontario's agricultural sector, help to stabilize farm incomes, and greatly contribute to the health of Ontario's communities. The Ontario healthcare sector serves roughly 115 million meals annually. This buying power could be leveraged to make significant changes in the food industry and on Ontario's agricultural landscape. Healthcare has the opportunity to demonstrate a

model of healthy, sustainable consumption that citizens can emulate and keep us all healthy. The starting point is to ask for local food on contracts and to have a statement of product origin at every transaction. Other options are infinite!

What is expected of us at the workshop? The workshop on April 20th will provide an occasion for stakeholders throughout the value-chain to come together and discuss the challenges and opportunities of increasing local food provision and procurement. The participatory framework means the day is devoted to small group conversations led by facilitators. Your participation and input will provide valuable insight into the direction of the food industry. This is an occasion for you to innovate and grow your food services. We ask that you come willing to participate with candour, an open mind, and a willingness to collaborate.

Some Useful Resources

[Ontario Seasonal Availability Guide](#) A month by month guide of what is available in Ontario.

[Local Food Plus](#) A Toronto-based non-profit that helps farmers and food achieve 'local, sustainable' certification for their growing methods. Look for 'certified local, sustainable' when buying!

[Foodland Ontario](#) The promotional site with info and details about Ontario's abundance; run by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)

[Menu 2020: Ten Good Food Ideas for Ontario](#) A paper by the Metcalf Foundation that introduces Ontario's good food gap: the gap between the farm crisis and the health crisis; with ten good ways to bridge this gap.

[Food Inc.](#) An Academy-award nominated documentary that examines our food system and what's wrong with it.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions before the workshop. Write or call Hayley from My Sustainable Canada at (647) 780-3653 or Hayley@greenhealthcare.ca.

See you on Wednesday!