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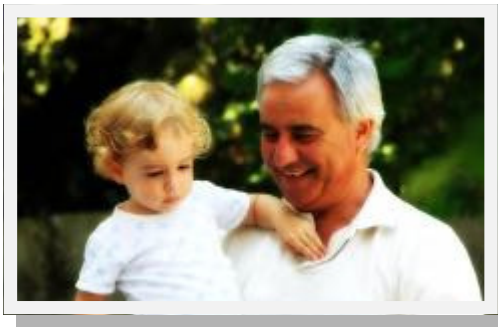


Green Party of Ontario
Food & Farming
Strategy
2011

Authorized by the CFO of the Green Party of Ontario

Feeding Our Communities by Championing Local Farms

A vibrant food and farming system in Ontario is essential to building a prosperous economy that nourishes our families and communities and promotes health and well-being for everyone.



Our food and farming system is experiencing significant challenges. Farm incomes are variable and negative for most sectors, food bank use is at an all-time high, and poor diets are contributing to rising health care costs.

The number of farmers is declining, the age of farmers is rising and fewer young people are growing food. Ontario only has 7,000 farmers under the age of 35. We are losing too much farmland to urban sprawl and competing land uses such as quarries. It's time to strengthen our food system so that Ontario can feed itself and others.

Fresh, healthy food plays a critical role in promoting good health. Poor diets make us vulnerable to heart disease, obesity and diabetes, which in turn leads to increased pressure on our health care system.

The Green Party of Ontario believes that a healthy food and local farming system needs to be a higher provincial priority. We are committed to putting forward an Ontario Food and Farming Strategy that supports Ontario farmers while providing all citizens with access to healthy local food. Green policies will work to support farmers and consumers within a framework of sustainable, local agriculture.

Components of the Green Party's Ontario Food and Farming Strategy include:

1. **Access to healthy food for Ontarians**
2. **Programs to support financially sustainable local food systems**
3. **Removing barriers to success for family farms and local food processors**

1. Access to Healthy Food for Ontarians

The Green Party of Ontario recognizes the need to better link our farmers – who produce some of the best food in the world - with our citizens, particularly in our larger cities.

Health care costs are rising, placing increased pressures on our healthcare system. A well-balanced diet can dramatically improve our health.

However, it can be difficult to manage a healthy diet within our busy lifestyles and competing demands. For those struggling to make ends meet, it can simply be out of reach.

Approximately three to four million Ontarians live in poverty and lack access to healthy food. This a major problem. For those living below the poverty line in the rural and Northern areas of Ontario, the inability to access healthy local food is even more difficult. Staple food items like apples can cost almost two times more for those residing in Northern communities.

Healthy food and local farmers can be part of the solution, and our Ontario Food and Farming Strategy begins to address the challenge of ensuring that all Ontarians have access to healthy food.

We will:

- **Establish a comprehensive healthy school food program, including purchasing targets for local food, including local sustainable and local organic.**
- **Invest in community food centres and food security programs, and provide tax credits for farmers and processors who donate to charities.**
- **Support Buy Local campaigns and set targets for government institutions.**



Provide Access to Healthy Food for Ontarians

We will establish a comprehensive healthy school food program, including purchasing targets for local food.

The foundation for our life-long eating patterns is set when we're young. We need to give our children tools to sustain healthy eating patterns. Children need to know more than what to eat, though; they also need to know how to grow and cook food.

Healthy eating can improve memory and concentration and support healthy growth and development. Additionally, good nutrition confronts head-on some major challenges of today, caused by childhood obesity and diabetes.

It's time for a healthy school food program that builds on the knowledge of local communities. The province should set guidelines and support local organizations and parents to establish a program that works best in their community and for their children.

Buying local, sustainable food for a healthy school food program not only promotes access to affordable and healthy food, it also supports Ontario farmers.



Your Green MPPs will:

- Invest \$200 million over four years for a healthy school food program. Now is the time to lay the foundation for a provincial school snack and lunch program that makes healthy, local sustainable food available in all our schools.
- Increase food literacy for families and children by adding food preparation and nutrition education courses to after-school and community programming; reintroduce food preparation courses to the high school curriculum.
- Build on the *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act* to include a comprehensive school food policy to make healthy eating the easy choice for all students.

Provide Access to Healthy Food for Ontarians

We will invest in community food centres and food security programs, and provide tax credits for farmers and processors who donate to charities

Community food centres promote food security and increase access to healthy, local food for Ontarians who need it. Programs offered by the centres include community gardens and kitchens, food banks, farmers markets, community cooking, and education programs for subjects such as sustainable food systems. The common goal is to provide participants with healthy and nutritious food, build community, support farmers and create opportunities.



Poor nutrition can lead to an increased risk of chronic and infectious diseases, low birth weight, and negative impacts on the growth and development of children. It costs more to treat and manage these diseases and conditions than it does to support programs that provide the nutritious food that might prevent them.

For example, research by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario has shown that, independent of other risk factors, diets rich in fruit, vegetables and whole grains may decrease risk of heart disease by as much as 30%.

An additional benefit of community food centres and food security programs is that they recognize the importance of support for local farmers and local food systems. The province should provide tax incentives for farmers and processors to make food donations and invest in their local communities.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Invest \$200 million over four years in community food programs that promote access to healthy food, community gardens, cooking and nutrition classes.
- Advocate for the expansion of food sharing programs like the Good Food Box program to target priority populations and neighbourhoods, with a particular focus on First Nations and children. Build partnerships with local food retailers to sell subsidized boxes.
- Conduct research and program evaluation on the value of dollars spent on programs that improve food security.

Provide Access to Healthy Food for Ontarians

We will support Buy Local campaigns and set targets for government institutions.

Local, sustainable food is not only an important tool for preventing illness and promoting health, but in fact, food and farming is the second largest employer in Ontario.

Family farms and farm support businesses are the backbone of rural communities and strengthen our local economies. Producing, marketing and consuming food locally provides greater benefits for the regional economy than importing food does.



On an environmental level, global food production and transportation produces approximately 30% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. By shifting food production and consumption from global to local, we can meet our targets to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and turn Ontario into a leader in the emerging low carbon global economy.

We know Ontarians want to buy more local products. We see this in the strength of organizations like Savour Muskoka, Prince Edward County's Taste Trail program, Local Food Plus, Just Food, Waterloo's Buy Local, Buy Fresh , among many others across the province that raise awareness of the availability and benefits of what grows nearby.

It makes sense for our economy, our health care system and our environment to buy local sustainable food. The Green Party believes that support for local sustainable food begins at home with the Ontario government. The provincial government needs to set the example by buying fresh, local products.

The Green Party will ensure that public institutions, such as hospitals and schools, buy increasing amounts of the food they serve from Ontario farmers. This will keep our food dollars in Ontario and support local farmers, processors, distributors and food services.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Immediately require public institutions to measure and report on local food purchases.
- Set a standard for purchasing 40% Ontario food for all public institutions, including local food certified sustainable and organic, with an increase over time.
- Work with municipalities and farm organizations to open new farmer's markets and promote existing farmer's markets, farm stores and other direct sales, as well as regional wholesale markets and hubs
- Increase enforcement of the accurate use of the Foodland Ontario label in retail stores so that consumers can be confident when they choose local.

2. Promote Programs to Support Financially Sustainable Local Food Systems

Ontario must invest in the rural infrastructure needed to rebuild self-reliant, local food systems and improve farm incomes.

Farm incomes are variable and negative for most sectors. Local food programs are a good start. But without consistent and bankable government support these efforts can only go so far.

The Green Party is committed to working with farmers, processors and other stakeholders to improve the business model for farmers and local food producers. For example, the decline of abattoirs and processing facilities makes it difficult for farmers to produce higher profit and branded products and for consumers to access local food. If Ontario farmers had access to these facilities, the benefits would include more jobs, access to new and different markets, and more opportunity for products with local, artisan and specialty brands.



Along with promotion, farmers sometimes need help getting their products to market. Breaking into the consolidated retail and distribution systems of big chain supermarkets is a challenge for many Ontario farmers.

Regulations can often place an unreasonable burden on family farmers and deprive all of us of the fruits of their labour. The Green Party will level the playing field to allow farmers to participate more fully in our local economy.

We will:

- Establish an Ontario Food and Farming Policy Council to coordinate planning across ministries and consult diverse stakeholders.
- Reward farmers for stewardship practices that provide environmental and societal benefits.
- Invest in rural infrastructure, research and innovation, bio-based manufacturing products, distribution hubs, farmer co-ops, organic and specialty crops to support farm incomes.

Promote Programs to Support Financially Sustainable Food Systems

We will coordinate planning across ministries and consult diverse stakeholders.

One of the issues with food and farming is that the sector spans multiple ministries, including agriculture, environment, health, and natural resources, to name just a few. This can lead to contradictory policies, regulations and decisions that have unintended consequences to family farmers, processors and retailers across the province.

There are many organizations filled with talented, diverse people working to improve food security, access to nutritious, local food and adequate farm incomes. What's missing is a coordinated link between these individuals and the government to proactively addresses issues of concern and establish positive plans for the future.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Create a multi-stakeholder Ontario Food and Farming Policy Council to advise the government on agricultural policies, plans and strategies, including the development of the Ontario Food and Farming Strategy.
- Establish a rural secretariat to coordinate policies affecting rural Ontario across ministries and agencies.
- Strengthen efforts to preserve farmland and farmers, including consulting with farmers, municipalities and other stakeholders on ways to expand the Greenbelt and to prevent competing land uses such as quarries and gas plants for prime farmland.



Promote Programs to Support Financially Sustainable Food Systems

We will reward farmers for stewardship practices that provide environmental and societal benefits.

Farmers are in a unique position to create environmental solutions through their decisions about how to use their land. Most farmers think long term and are good stewards, even though market pressures often push them in other directions.

Government should stop viewing farmers as problems in the environmental equation and instead view them as partners in delivering environmental solutions.

It is time to recognize and reward farmers for their stewardship of clean air and water, biodiversity and habitat preservation and carbon sequestration. These are public benefits that improve our health, strengthen local economies and responsibly manage our natural resources and natural capital.



Programs that pay farms for ecological goods and services exist in most developed countries. The Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program is an example of a grassroots, farmer-driven, solutions-oriented approach to environmental issues in agriculture. Successful ALUS projects exist in Manitoba, in Ontario's Norfolk County and in Prince Edward Island. The Green Party believes it is time to expand the ALUS concept in Ontario by establishing pilot projects across the province.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Invest in expanding the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program to reward farmers for good stewardship practices and compensate them for the public benefits of the environmental goods and services that they provide, including promoting biodiversity, preserving habitat and wildlife, storing carbon and ensuring clean water.

Promote Programs to Support Financially Sustainable Food Systems

We will invest in rural infrastructure, research and innovation, bio-based manufacturing products, distribution hubs, farmer co-ops, organic and specialty crops to support farm incomes.

Investments in rural infrastructure are needed to rebuild local value chains and foster prosperous and vibrant local food systems.

Ontario's farmers also need a government that understands that rural infrastructure goes far beyond roads and bridges. Our rural communities need investments in modern food processing facilities that can help farmers get their products into local stores and in markets around the world. Rural infrastructure provides consumers with the opportunity to purchase fresh, local foods in Ontario stores and markets.

The Green Party's plan starts by working with farmers, processors, and other agricultural workers to develop, access and promote local markets. The Green Party will support farmers to seek out new markets, alternative revenue streams and higher value markets such as organic production.

The Green Party will also support producer owned enterprises and organizations that focus on increasing value by encouraging producer cooperation, coordinating warehousing and supply management, creating better handling and distribution systems, and developing branded products.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Introduce a package of tax credits of \$435 million over four years to:
 - Foster local marketing and distribution systems, such as access to post-harvest handling and storage facilities, distribution hubs and regional wholesale markets to promote local food and provide farmers with a fair share of the consumer food dollar.
 - Support research into new revenue streams for farmers such as energy from biomass and plant-based manufacturing materials
 - Support organic farm business training, development of organic processing capacity and peer-based internship and training programs to assist new farmers and those converting to organic production.
 - Support innovative programs to assist farmers in developing new business models and sources of revenue.
 - Support local branding and education projects that assist farmers in obtaining higher returns for the products.
- Reform and expand organic crop insurance programs to cover producers of all organic commodities.
- Improve access to the Ontario Food Terminal (OFT) for local farmers. More than any other facility in the province, the OFT facilitates food transactions. Yet, most of the food sold there is not grown in Ontario. With better infrastructure in place for local growers and easier access for local farmers, the OFT could help Ontario farmers better access local markets.

3. Remove Barriers to Success for Family Farms and Local Food Processors

Local food processors and family farms create jobs and are an essential part of building a sustainable, prosperous local economy.



According to a recent survey conducted by Farmers Feed Cities, 99% of Ontarians overwhelmingly agree that farming is important to Ontario's well-being. Yet, we've created tax and regulatory barriers to their success.

Local food processors are vital for farmers to get their products to market. And although regulations are critically important to maintaining food safety and meeting environmental and land use objectives, we've created a regulatory framework that is making it difficult for many local food processors, especially small abattoirs to compete.

The Green Party is committed to reversing the closure of local food processing facilities because they are essential to a profitable, sustainable local food system.

The Green Party's Ontario Food and Farming Strategy includes the end of one-size-fits-all regulations. We support the introduction of smart regulations that take the size and scope of a business into consideration and create a level playing field for all food producers. We also support tax reform so farmers are not penalized for value added, value retention and local food facilities essential to the operation of their farms.

The Green Party also supports income stabilization and business risk management programs that are accessible for all family farms across diverse agricultural sectors.

We will:

- End one-size-fits-all regulations for family farms and local food processors; implement smart regulations that recognize differences in the size of operations.
- Eliminate tax penalties and reduce zoning restrictions to facilitate local, on-farm food enterprises and innovative sources of farm income.
- Improve income stabilization programs so they are more accessible for family farms, cover a wider range of products and don't penalize farmers who experience bad years.

Remove Barriers to Success for Family Farms and Local Food Processors

We will end one-size-fits-all regulations for family farms and local food processors; implement smart regulations that recognize differences in the size of operations.

The Green Party recognizes the burdens that the government places on family farms and processors. Many regulations are designed for large businesses.

We believe regulations need to be reviewed to give small and medium sized businesses and family farms a level playing field. Smaller companies need regulations that make sense – not a one-size-fits-all approach that buries them in red tape.

Smart regulations ensure food safety while taking into account the size and scale of operations, allowing local businesses to compete fairly on a level playing field.

As well, we need to rethink how we address environmental issues in agriculture, if we don't want our local farmers to become an endangered species. The Green Party supports increasing incentives and reducing prescriptive regulations to achieve essential environmental objectives.

The Green Party is committed to working with the food and agricultural sector, as well as other levels of government, to develop regulations, by-laws and zoning laws appropriate for family farms and farm-based businesses.



Your Green MPPs will:

- Promote smart regulations that support local and artisan food processors by considering the size and scale of operations.
- Reduce regulated market barriers for local wineries and craft brewers.
- Support incentive based programs such as an expanded Environmental Farm Plan and Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) to encourage and reward environmental stewardship, while reducing the regulatory burden on farmers.

Remove Barriers to Success for Family Farms and Local Food Processors

We will eliminate tax penalties and reduce zoning restrictions to facilitate local, on-farm food enterprises and innovative sources of farm income.



The Green Party will seek out and take advantage of innovative ways to support farmers that recognize the key role they play in our economy, health, environment and energy supply.

The Green Party supports farmers engaging in value-added production and seeking innovative sources of revenue. Unfortunately, government policies passed to address concerns associated with large commercial operations often create barriers to success for family farms. We understand the need for a clear definition of farm lands to include land and buildings essential to a farm operation in order to avoid tax penalties for production buildings, value-retention, storage and packing facilities.

Farmers need to know that they can invest in their businesses without placing them at a competitive disadvantage.

Changes are needed in the property tax system so that farmers investing in small scale commercial enterprises and value-added processing facilities focused on local food production do not face negative tax implications. Farmers must have the support of the government in recognizing that these facilities are essential to a profitable and sustainable farm sector and a strong local food system.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Eliminate tax penalties farm-based value-added and commercial innovations using on farm and local food products.
- Eliminate tax penalties for production, storage, value-retention and packing facilities as well as temporary accommodation bunkhouses.
- Reduce zoning restrictions for small-scale on farm commercial enterprises.
- Support for new revenue streams for farmers such as on-farm power generation with solar, wind, biomass, biogas and agri-food innovation like fibres for the auto sector.

Remove Barriers to **Success** for Family Farms and Local Food Processors

We will improve income stabilization programs so they are more accessible for family farms, cover a wider range of products and don't penalize farmers who experience bad years.

If we are to maintain food security and keep farmers on the land, Ontario needs income support programs designed to support family farms from all sectors.

The Green Party supports a permanent, bankable business risk management program. The Green Party also seeks to work with the farm sector to develop effective programs to manage losses from wildlife.

The Green Party will support efforts to bring the federal government to the table to support a business risk management program.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Support Business Risk Management Programs that are more accessible for a diverse range of farms and don't penalize farmers who experience bad years.
- Support a program to assist farmers with succession planning and farm apprenticeship programs.
- Consult the farm community and other stakeholders on a program to reduce losses from wildlife.

