

Identifying Regional Opportunities for Local Production



Local food is of growing interest to Ontarians. Market research shows that 80% of shoppers are interested in and likely to purchase fresh, local food.¹ This is good news for Ontario's farmers, who produce over 200 different products, from grains to meat and dairy to specialty fruits and vegetables. Despite this high interest, consumers can find it challenging to access local food.² There is room to grow Ontario's production of food for local and regional consumption and meet these needs. A recent report found that of the \$20 billion in food that Ontario imports annually, more than half could be grown in the province.³

Producers are aware of this interest in local food and many wish to expand their businesses and increase revenue streams in the regional food scene. This may be through entering new markets, scaling up on-site processing and value-add, waste diversion of food products, improving business-to-business coordination with processors and distributors, or other methods. However, there can be barriers to achieving such expansion.

What are the project objectives?

- A. The goal of this project is to work directly with agri-food producers and regional groups to understand the challenges, barriers, and opportunities for producer business development in Ontario
- B. Develop a support strategy to assist Ontario producers wishing to expand their businesses, increase revenue streams, and/or access new markets

The project team will target agri-food stakeholders in Ontario, with a focus on local producers, regional groups, commodity associations, and other farm and food businesses.

How will we achieve our objectives?

- Conduct key informant interviews with stakeholders representing the Ontario agri-food sector
- Distribute an online survey to Ontario farmers to gain a better understanding of the barriers and opportunities to on farm business development
- Conduct two half-day workshops to develop recommendations for overcoming barriers and amplifying opportunities

The assessment will include such areas of focus as:

- What products are grown and underutilized,
- What could be incorporated into local processing,
- What assets (equipment) pose an opportunity or barrier and why,
- Potential improvements to communications and B2B networking,
- Regulatory or other such constructs,

Questions or concerns? Feel free to contact us.

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¹ Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Ontario's Local Food Report, 2015/16 Edition. Retrieved on 9 May, 2018 from http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/local_food_rpt16.pdf

² Metcalf Foundation. (2008). Food Connects Us All: Sustainable Local Food in Southern Ontario. Retrieved on 9 May, 2018 from <https://metcalfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/food-connects-us-all.pdf>.

³ Econometrics Research Limited, Harry Cummings & Associates, and Rod MacRae, PhD. (2015). Dollars & Sense: Opportunities to Strengthen Southern Ontario's Food System. Retrieved May 11, 2018 from <https://metcalfoundation.com/stories/publications/dollars-and-sense-opportunities-to-strengthen-southern-ontarios-food-system/>.