

# Plant-based food procurement and Ontario agriculture

Why we need a balanced plate of food choices

A few Ontario municipalities have adopted “plant-based food procurement” policies. These policies encourage schools, hospitals, community centres, and other public institutions to buy more plant-based foods and, in some cases, reduce or phase out animal-based foods to address climate change, protect biodiversity, and improve food security.

**Ontario's food and farming sector supports:**



A balanced food system with farms that grow and raise more than 200 different food and farm products



Food processors, rural jobs, the environment and community well-being

We believe policy decisions should reflect the full and balanced picture of Ontario's food system.

## Challenge

Many plant-based procurement proposals focus on reducing animal-sourced foods to meet climate goals.



**However, these proposals often overlook:**

- How plant and animal agriculture depend on each other
- Strong animal care legislation and standards
- Ontario's local food processing sector and the jobs it supports
- The critical role of livestock in soil health, nutrient recycling, and carbon storage
- The diversity of foods needed to meet nutrition needs, cultural food traditions, and community expectations

Without balanced information, policies may unintentionally harm local farmers, processors, rural communities, and the availability of diverse, affordable foods in public institutions.

## Solution

Farmers are already making major investments in environmental stewardship, animal care, soil health, and climate solutions—and the agri-food sector is one of the biggest pillars of the Ontario economy.

**Ontario agri-food is:**

**\$51 billion+**  
generated for Ontario's economy

**867,000+ jobs**  
for 10% of the provincial workforce

**\$28 billion**  
in agri-food exports\*<sup>1</sup>

**We can help:**



Ensure municipalities have the facts about how Ontario produces both plant and animal-based foods



Support procurement that reflects Ontario's complete home grown food system

<sup>1</sup> Source: In 2024, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Agribusiness statistics

# Why animal agriculture matters

## Economic impact

Agriculture and food processing contribute over \$51 billion to Ontario's economy each year and support hundreds of thousands of jobs. Livestock, dairy, and poultry farming are major parts of that economic engine.

### This means:

- Jobs on the farm, in processing and across the economy in transportation and related industries
- Local demand for feed, veterinary care, equipment, trucking, and building trades
- Business for retailers, processors, and manufacturers including in Ontario's biggest cities

### Did you know?

10% of Ontario's jobs are directly tied to the agri-food sector

Canada-wide, livestock production alone supports close to

**400,000 jobs<sup>2</sup>**

A big drop in public sector purchases of animal-based foods could cause financial strain for farms, food processors, and rural communities.

## Food security and community well-being

Ontario's food system is built on diversity. We grow and raise more than 200 different food and farm products, and plant and animal agriculture depend on each other.

### Here's how:

- Animals are upcyclers, helping re-use crop residues and damaged or "ugly" crops like carrots or potatoes that can't be marketed, and would otherwise go to landfill
- Manure enriches soil and reduces the need for synthetic fertilizer
- Mixed farms that grow crops and raise livestock help keep jobs strong year-round

Limiting entire categories of food in public institutions can reduce food choices, make it harder to serve culturally appropriate meals, and weaken local purchasing relationships.

<sup>2</sup> <https://livestockresearch.ca/uploads/assets/files/Forces-Impacting-Animal-Agriculture-in-Canada-A-Synthesis-1.pdf>

## Environment and climate solutions

Both animal and plant-based food production are compatible with climate goals.

Livestock farms, especially pasture- and hay-based ones, keep significant amounts of carbon out of the atmosphere. Pastures and fields act like giant sponges, soaking up and storing millions of tonnes of carbon each year.

### For example:

- Keeping the ground covered with crops year-round and working the land less to prevent soil erosion
- Using smarter animal nutrition to lower the environmental footprint of meat, milk and eggs
- Managing pastures to protect biodiversity and store carbon

### What's the outcome?

Canada has some of the lowest carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from beef and pork production anywhere in the world: outclassing even Western Europe, South American and Australia.<sup>3</sup>

## Public perception and social impact

Plant-based food campaigns can influence how the public views farmers and the kind of food Ontario produces. If the narrative around our food system focuses only on negative perceptions, **it can harm:**

- Consumer confidence
- The mental health of farm families
- Long-standing partnerships between farmers, processors, and public institutions

Canada's Food Guide recommends we eat a variety of healthy foods each day and that includes fruit, vegetables, a variety of proteins, and whole grains.



Ontario's food system works best when it offers choice, balance, and nutrition for everyone—including plant-based and animal-based foods.

<sup>3</sup> [https://livestockresearch.ca/forces\\_impacting\\_animal\\_agriculture\\_in\\_canada](https://livestockresearch.ca/forces_impacting_animal_agriculture_in_canada)

Questions about livestock farming and our climate?  
We can help!

More information and resources are available at [ofa.on.ca](http://ofa.on.ca).