

briefing note

Date: October 16, 2008
To: Toronto City Councillors
From: Toronto Environmental Alliance
Re: Local Food Procurement Policy and Implementation Plan



TEA urges the Government Management Committee at its October 21st meeting and City Council at its October 29th and 30th meeting to adopt the Local Food Procurement Policy and Implementation Plan (dated October 6, 2008) with the following amendments:

Add to the end of Recommendation 5 the following:

"and that the policy development work and action plan be based on:

- (i) achieving a purchasing target of 50% local food as soon as possible, with annual measurements gauging progress;*
- (ii) annually increasing the purchase of local sustainable food (as part of the 50% target), in recognition of the fact that local sustainable food yields the greatest greenhouse gas and smog related emissions reduction potential.*

Background:

The City of Toronto first agreed to create a local food procurement policy as recommended in the unanimously approved *Change is in the Air* Climate Change, Clean Air and Sustainable Energy Action Plan in July 2007.

Recommendation 2(i) in the *Local Food Procurement Policy and Implementation Plan* Staff Report sets the correct tone for the development of a meaningful local food procurement policy by stating:

"...it is the policy of City Council to progressively increase the percentage of food being served at City owned facilities or purchased for City operations from local sources."

The Staff Report sets out a prudent plan suggesting a phased approach for implementation beginning with the Children's Services Division, and requiring staff to report, before the 2010 budget process, on an action plan for City-wide implementation.

However, the local food procurement policy and implementation plan should also include:

- An aim of achieving 50% local food purchasing as soon as possible, with annual measurements gauging progress, and
- A mechanism to initiate the purchase of local sustainable food, in recognition of the fact that local sustainable food yields the greatest greenhouse gas and smog related emissions reduction potential.

As farmers and agricultural experts have repeatedly stated, there is more than enough supply in Ontario to meet the 50% target. According to the 2006 Census, there are more than 57,000 farms in operation in Ontario with 3,700 of those in the Greater Toronto Area. Put simply, if we want more fresh Ontario produce, grown in the Greenbelt and surrounding area, all we have to do is ask our farming neighbours to send it to us.

And local food is cost competitive compared to imported food. As the staff report outlines, in season, Ontario grown produce is often cheaper than the same imported crop. Importing food when local produce is available not only costs us more, it causes harm to the environment with unneeded greenhouse gas and smog related emissions.

As well, buying local food keeps our dollars in the local economy and supports local businesses. Food experts have noted that every \$1 spent on local food creates \$2 - \$4 worth of local economic activity.

While local food is better than imported food, the best food for the environment and for human health is local sustainable food. Food production accounts for about 17% of energy use in the food system, and subsequently generates more greenhouse gas and smog-related emissions than the transportation of food alone (11% of food system energy use). So, to ensure greater reductions in greenhouse gases and smog-related emissions, the City needs to increase the percentage of the local and sustainable food it purchases.

In Ontario, 9 out of 10 people surveyed prefer to buy local food first. In June 2008 Markham became the first municipality in Canada to adopt a local and sustainable food procurement policy. More recently Wal-Mart US has begun purchasing state-grown local food for its stores. Here in Canada, the Loblaws and Sobey's chains of grocery stores have begun promoting that they are purposely selecting local produce for their customers.

It's time for the City of Toronto to catch up.

We urge members of the Government Management Committee to adopt the staff recommendations, as amended above.

For further information contact:

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