



Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee

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Deputation to the General Government Management Committee

City of Toronto

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Proposed Local Food Procurement Policy and Implementation Plan

The Greater Toronto Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC) welcomes Toronto's initiative to develop a local food procurement policy and implementation plan.

We are a unique partnership involving the four Greater Toronto Area Federations of Agriculture (Halton, Peel, York and Durham) representing 3,700 farmers, your four neighbours, the regional municipalities of Halton, Peel, York and Durham, the City of Toronto, Toronto Food Policy Council, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and representatives from the food sector. The Action Committee was created to implement the GTA Agricultural Action Plan. That plan includes a theme of capturing the economic, social and health benefits of locally grown, locally raised and locally processed food — for the benefit of all — from farmers to consumers.

Two recent GTA forums on the Agricultural Action Plan have put more emphasis on the importance of local food procurement policies and on strategies for local food and near-urban agriculture. We applaud the proposal that will make it the policy of the City of Toronto "to progressively increase the percentage of food being served at City owned facilities or purchased for City operations from local sources."

Your proposed policy is an important step with a lot of future potential for economic, social and health benefits. A policy of buying locally grown, locally raised or locally processed is timely and astute. Getting the details in place, as the staff report before you indicates, is more challenging simply because our food system has not been challenged to track from where our food comes.

Toronto leadership on local food procurement has diverse benefits:

- The local economy benefits — processing and farming exists in Toronto, on your doorstep in the Greenbelt and across Ontario. A policy that tracks source will result in more products carrying the Foodland Ontario label and the emergence of regional brands;
- The environment benefits — greenhouse gas and smog emissions caused by transportation will decline;
- Consumers benefit — a short ride means fresher food in the kitchen. Fresh food is quality food;
- Farmers benefit — a policy to progressively increase local sourcing will create an incentive for farmers to identify their production as locally grown;



- Communities benefit — new connections between eaters and producers create possibilities for stronger urban-rural relationships;
- Urban credibility in the countryside will benefit — support for locally grown food is a signal to farmers and rural landowners that you value their efforts to earn a living and do not just treasure their natural assets, for example, the Greenbelt;
- The Ontario economy benefits — your commitment to locally grown food will encourage Ontario farmers and processors to invest locally and limit the growing gap between agri-food imports \$15 billion and exports \$8.7 billion.

Your initiative will be watched by farmers, food processors and many other agencies and jurisdictions. There is a rising tide of interest in locally grown, locally raised and locally processed food. Last fall at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair the GTA AAC asked visitors to our exhibit about locally grown food: “Do you support public institutions adopting a policy that commits them to serving a minimum percentage of locally grown food?” 86.9% of the 1,513 respondents said, “Yes.”

“Progressively increasing the percentage of food from local sources” is a leading –edge policy direction. There will be interest, questions and encouragement from many sources.

From the GTA AAC and Ontario farmers you can count on more than encouragement — count on a partnership that will help your facilities and operations source locally. The GTA AAC is already providing support for the culinary tourism sector and its growing interest in sourcing local product. We are enabling the participation of local farmers in the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance website (<http://www.ontarioculinarytourism.com/>) and growing the connections between chefs and farmers.

GTA and Ontario farmers are producing most of the products that Toronto’s Children Services and its suppliers are sourcing. And, if not the exact product, then a good substitute for that product. The local food that is needed by the proposed policy is being produced in the GTA and beyond. Local farmers are ready, willing and able to develop supply direct or through processors and caterers. They will be appreciative of new orders.

If there are any difficulties in supply, the GTA AAC will work with local farmers to raise their awareness of emerging opportunities as they plan for their fields, their barns or their greenhouses. Once Toronto makes a commitment to source local food, farm entrepreneurs and others in the food chain will be adapting their businesses to meet that need.

We note that this procurement policy has emerged as an initiative in Toronto’s Climate Change, Clean Air & Sustainable Energy Action Plan. Farmer interest in locally grown and our support for your proposed policy is based on the broad range of benefits noted above. We urge you to adopt this policy with a broader framework in mind than climate change.

The Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee applauds the City of Toronto for this initiative. We encourage you to proceed and will be pleased to support the implementation of your policy.

Elbert van Donkersgoed
Executive Director