



Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy

Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021





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Golden Horseshoe
Food and Farming Action Plan 2021
There are two reports produced as part of this project:
Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan
Implementation Strategy and Background Report

To acquire these documents in electronic format, please visit
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Securing the Future of Food and Farming in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe

The Golden Horseshoe of Ontario, stretching along the shores of Lake Ontario, is not only the fastest growing region of Canada with a diverse and sophisticated urban population, it is a vast, rich agricultural area and home to one of the largest food and farming clusters in North America. Comprised of the Regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, York and the Cities of Hamilton and Toronto, the Golden Horseshoe produces over 200 different types of agricultural crops and contains the majority of Ontario's food processing operations, head offices of major food retail merchandisers, Canadian headquarters of global consumer branded food companies and Ontario's food distribution centres. Characterized by thousands of vibrant entrepreneurs in food and farming, the Golden Horseshoe is home to both heritage family farms and flourishing family businesses founded by first generation Canadians.

As farmers in the Golden Horseshoe, we see a wealth of opportunities for the Golden Horseshoe to grow as an internationally renowned centre for food production. However there are challenges that are impeding the growth of food and farming in the region.

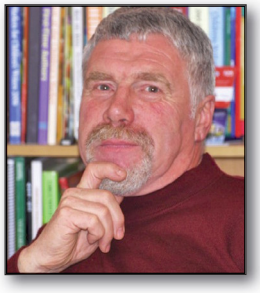
Strong leadership, progressive policies and cooperative action are required to address these challenges and capitalize on opportunities. In this day when food production is a growing concern in many nations, we owe it to future generations to ensure that the Golden Horseshoe retains and expands its role as a leading food and farming cluster.

This plan is a call to action to take on this challenge. We invite you to join our group of farmers, industry leaders and politicians to implement this plan to make the Golden Horseshoe the leading food and farming cluster in the world.



Nick Ferri
Chair
Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee

Photo credit: Anne Howden Thompson



Peter Lambrick
Chair
Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan Steering Committee

Photo credit: Anne Howden Thompson

"Think of agriculture as the solution provider to society."
John Oliver, President of Maple Leaf Bio-Concepts and Lojon Associates International, in Oshawa, ON

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WHY THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE?

Ontario's Golden Horseshoe is home to the one of the largest food and farming clusters in North America. The region's superb agricultural land is complemented by a moderate climate and access to an abundant supply of fresh water. The one million acres of farmland under production within the boundaries of the region generate in excess of $1.5 billion in gross farm receipts annually from a production profile that includes 200 different agricultural commodities. Both provincially designated specialty crop areas in Ontario, the tender fruit and grape lands of the Niagara Peninsula and the vegetable producing "muck" soil of the Holland Marsh are located in the Golden Horseshoe. It is home to the majority of Ontario's tender fruit and grape production and the majority of the province's floriculture greenhouses.

When the value of the food processing component of the cluster is factored in, the annual economic activity is estimated to be $12.3 billion across the food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe. This direct economic activity, in turn, is estimated to contribute $35 billion annually to Canada's economy through the multiplier effect. Food processing businesses in the region now employ more workers than the auto industry. In support of all of this activity, the Golden Horseshoe has significant, broadly based research and innovation capacity within its boundaries.

As one of the pillars of the Golden Horseshoe's diversified economy, the food and farming cluster has great potential for sustainable growth over the next ten years and beyond. A rich endowment of soil, water resources and infrastructure combined with access to a large diverse market, an abundant, educated labour force and outstanding research capabilities are among the advantages that stand to propel the cluster forward.

FOOD AND FARMING CLUSTER

A **cluster** is defined as a geographic region with a sufficient number of activities with similar or related needs and interests to generate external economies of scale and produce innovation.

A **food and farming cluster** is comprised of enterprises and institutions involved in growing, harvesting, processing and distributing food, beverage and bioproducts derived from agriculture. The phrase is used to describe the combined activities and outputs of primary production (farmers), food processing, food service providers (including hotels, restaurants, and institutions), food wholesalers/distributors and food retailers/merchandisers and the input suppliers and service providers to the cluster. Essential supporting activities that are a vital part of the cluster are those that provide services, impart skills and training, undertake research and innovation and enable commercialization.

Food and farming includes ornamental products, equestrian activities, bioproducts, and bio-energy applications.

VALUE CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Value chain management is an interdependent approach to business where trading partners improve their combined competitiveness by collaborating to more effectively and efficiently deliver a product or service to the consumer. Value chain management differs from traditional buyer-seller relationships in that there is a commitment among the chain partners to share information, risks and rewards in the expectation that the entire chain can achieve more by working together than if working independently for self-interest.

Martin Gooch, Director, Value Chain Management Centre, George Morris Centre

WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN?

The potential for the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster to grow **cannot be taken for granted**. There are challenges that need to be understood and addressed. The food and farming cluster is diverse. Paradoxically, while the defining characteristics make the cluster resilient, there has been a lack of focus and collective purpose in formulating integrated policies to support and nurture its growth.

Key challenges faced by the food and farming businesses in the region are complex. The challenges include:

- fierce competition for land which:
  - drives land prices beyond the reach of farmers and results in the conversion of farmland to other uses;
  - impedes the development of new businesses and the expansion of existing businesses;
- lack of public awareness about the opportunities and advantages associated with the food and farming cluster;
- multiple, disjointed regulations and policies that detract from the ability to do business efficiently;
- congestion that negatively affects the efficient movement of goods and the cost of transportation;
- rising costs of energy and uncertainty over the impact of global climate change;
- expanding urban-based infrastructure that impacts the ability to farm efficiently;
- lack of integration among different parts of the cluster; and
- gaps in infrastructure that prevent integration.

By addressing and managing these challenges, farmers, government, business and other stakeholders will help the cluster flourish.



Photo credit: Jamie Reaume

HOW DID THE PLAN START?

The competition for land between urban development and agriculture is ongoing in the Golden Horseshoe. As the struggle to manage growth while protecting farmland intensified in the 1990's, regional planners and agricultural groups started working together to find acceptable solutions. The Province became actively involved in the process with the enactment of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan in 2002, the Greenbelt Plan in 2005 and the Places to Grow, Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe in 2006. Enactment of this legislation was the catalyst that brought additional parties involved in food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe together. Although these plans addressed the protection of the agricultural land from a land use planning perspective, they failed to address the economic viability of farming business. Those involved in food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe recognized that they had common interests and that by working together they had potential to

- support economic viability for all components of the food and farming cluster;
- maintain the agricultural land base;
- build better regional connections throughout the food and farming value chain; and
- reduce regulatory barriers to enable the cluster to thrive.



Photo credit: Vineland Research Innovation Centre

In response to this opportunity, in August 2009, the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, in co-operation with the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC)[1], the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors' Alliance[2], the Region of Niagara and the City of Hamilton, met to discuss the issues related to food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe.

As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that everyone present was addressing similar challenges, investing in similar projects across the Golden Horseshoe and working to support components of the food and farming cluster. Working under the leadership of the GTA AAC, Region of Niagara, City of Hamilton and Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, the partners secured funding, consulted with stakeholders, government agencies and industry representatives and collaborated to create a strategy and action plan to support food and farming across the Golden Horseshoe and in the Holland Marsh.

This **Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021** is the result of the ensuing collaboration. This plan is a call to action to support what we have and to enrich it.

1. The GTA AAC is comprised of representatives from governments and organizations associated with agriculture, agri-food business and the local food system in the City of Toronto and the Regions of Durham, Halton, Peel and York. For more information about the GTA AAC go to www.gtaaac.ca.
2. Greater Toronto Countryside Mayor's Alliance municipalities include: City of Pickering, Municipality of Clarington, Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge, Brock, King, East Gwillimbury and the Towns of Whitchurch-Stouffville, Aurora, Newmarket, Georgina, Milton, Caledon and Halton Hills.

WHAT WILL THE PLAN ACHIEVE?

This Food and Farming Action Plan for the Golden Horseshoe provides a blueprint for supporting and growing a thriving, integrated food and farming sector in the Golden Horseshoe. It responds to the common challenges and opportunities the area shares. These challenges and opportunities arise from the large concentration of population, growth pressures, conflict between agricultural and urban land uses, myriad of regulations and overlapping agencies, and cluster of food and farming enterprises located within it. The plan focuses on **enhancing competitiveness**, **promoting sustainability** and **removing barriers** that stand in the way of achieving these goals.

"Agriculture in the Golden Horseshoe is poised to serve the changing face of the Canadian population. As a cluster with global reach we must work together to seize the opportunities that will lead to change but also growth."

Dr. Jim Brandle, CEO Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

WHY A TEN YEAR TIME FRAME?

The action plan covers a ten year period from 2011 to 2021. This timeline was chosen in response to election timetables at the municipal and provincial levels, census cycles, and to incorporate the scheduled review of the Greenbelt Plan in 2015. A ten year time frame allows sufficient time to achieve the longer term goals, and is of manageable duration when asking partners for commitments.

WHAT ARE THE KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS?

Success depends on **strong leadership** and a **commitment from the diverse partners** identified in the plan, to work together towards common goals. If each partner does their part, with the assistance of strong and focused leaders, the result will be the emergence of a stronger, more secure food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe. The cluster will be an engine for economic growth that will sustain food production and contribute to healthy living in the region and beyond for future generations.

One of the fundamental guiding principles established by the Steering Committee[3] in preparing the Action Plan was to avoid duplication of effort and build on existing work that addresses food and farming issues. Each of the partners in this process has been working on advancing food and farming interests. This Action Plan builds on past results and incorporates plans that are ongoing. Where one partner is advanced in the management of a particular issue, their lead role will continue and the positive experiences and lessons learned about the issue will be applied to the entire Golden Horseshoe.

The plan must be implemented as a complete package. "Cherry picking" individual parts will not achieve the goals. The actions and tasks must work together as a co-ordinated plan.

3. The Steering Committee members are listed on page 23.

WHAT ARE THE KEY OPPORTUNITIES?

The timing of this Action Plan is opportune. There is a convergence of circumstances that support implementation of a successful plan.

Actions need to focus on specific goals:

- create a positive environment for investors;
- seed new enterprises through commercialization and incubation;
- attract global enterprises as their preferred investment destination;
- maintain the land base for agriculture and create the circumstances that support profitable, sustainable farming in the Golden Horseshoe;
- raise public awareness about the contribution of the food and farming cluster to health;
- increase access to locally grown food, promoting a consumer culture of quality over price and celebrating regional product;
- use the experience and connections of the Golden Horseshoe's diverse population to open markets for food and farming products in countries with rapid economic and population growth; and
- build first class infrastructure to service the food and farming cluster.

"Canada is positioned to leverage the trust we Canadians have in our safe food supply to gain the confidence of the world. Canada can become renowned for food of outstanding quality as Switzerland is for the strength of its finance sector."

Dr. Gord Surgeoner, President, Ontario Agri-Food Technologies

hoto credit: http://www.greenbelt.ca/multimedia/photos/Halton/Hamilton



CHOOSING THE ACTIONS

This plan focuses specifically on actions that support food and farming businesses in the Golden Horseshoe. To assess which actions should be included in the plan, the Steering Committee used three fundamental tests:

- Is the action addressing a Golden Horseshoe specific issue?
- Will the action make a real difference to the future of food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe?
- Is the action realistic and therefore achievable?



Photo credit: Jamie Reaume

"Ontario is Canada's largest province by population, and the agriculture and agri-food sector is its number one employer. In the Greater Toronto Area and R&D driven south-western Ontario, 210,000 researchers, industry employees, innovators and collaborators have built a stellar reputation for reliable, sustainable sources of agricultural raw materials, state of-the-art automated food processing methods, and world class food safety standards."

Gerry Pisarzowski, VP, Business Development, Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance, September 2011.

Vineland Research and Innovation Centre



The Action Plan

The food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe is diverse and multi-faceted with tremendous potential to expand. The essential elements of this cluster are well-established, anchored on the prime agricultural land base. Factors that make the Golden Horseshoe so unique and well suited to food and farming include:

- a combination of rich soil, abundant fresh water and a moderate climate;
- a well established food and beverage manufacturing sector;
- a concentration of food retail and food service businesses driven by entrepreneurs;
- access to abundant skilled labour; and
- multi-modal transportation systems.

The partners supporting this Action Plan include representatives from all parts of the food and farming cluster. Together they endorse this vision for food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe:

THE VISION

The Golden Horseshoe is globally renowned as a vibrant food and farming cluster, characterized by profitable farming operations, a thriving hub of food processing, food retail and food service businesses, extensive research capacity, innovative technology, and a wide range of healthy and safe products.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

The Action Plan focuses on five opportunities to achieve the vision.

A. GROW THE CLUSTER
Grow the Golden Horseshoe cluster so it becomes the leading food and farming cluster in the world, renowned for healthy and safe products.

B. LINK FOOD, FARMING AND HEALTH
Educate current and future consumers about the importance of locally sourced food and farming products for enhancing their health and well-being.

C. FOSTER INNOVATION
Encourage and support innovation to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster.

D. ENABLE THE CLUSTER
Align policy tools and their application to enable food and farming businesses to be increasingly competitive and profitable.

E. CULTIVATE NEW APPROACHES
Pilot new approaches to support food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe.

A. GROW THE CLUSTER

Grow the Golden Horseshoe cluster so it becomes the leading food and farming cluster in the world, renowned for healthy and safe products.

Farming and food are vital contributors to the economy of the Golden Horseshoe, providing food to families and bioproducts to industry while creating jobs and healthy communities. Agricultural production and food processing are estimated to generate $12.3 billion in output annually in the Golden Horseshoe. This direct output, in turn, stimulates $35 billion of total estimated annual economic activity across Canada's economy.

Ontario's food and beverage manufacturing sector, a vital part of the food and farming value chain, employs over 110,000 people directly and over 100,000 more in related industries. The majority of this workforce activity occurs within the Golden Horseshoe.

The unique physical land features combined with high quality soils and moderate climate have given the area a wealth of agricultural and economic opportunities. This favourable endowment of soil and climate enables the Golden Horseshoe to produce over 200 crops. The region is also one of the most densely populated, culturally diverse areas in Canada, with a population of 8.1 million in 2011, projected to grow to 11.5 million by 2031. These factors, combined with the area's food processing sector and proximity to the American market, give the Golden Horseshoe opportunities not found in other areas of the province – access to domestic and international markets, a skilled labour force, transportation infrastructure and a wide variety of post-secondary educational institutions.



Photo credit: http://www.greenbelt.ca/multimedia/photos/Halton/Hamilton

"Canadians are increasingly aware of food and food issues. They are showing concern with the environmental impact of our food supply. They are concerned with the impact of urban development. And more so than ever, spurred by stories of food riots, under and poorly nourished Canadian children and a rapidly growing global population, Canadians are concerned about the availability of food domestically and abroad."

Neil Currie and Garnet Etsell, National Food Strategy Steering Committee

At the same time, the cluster faces the following barriers to growth:

- pressure on profitability;
- competition from the importation of low-cost offshore food products;
- aging farm operators;
- infrastructure gaps;
- expensive land and rising labour costs;
- gaps and inefficiencies in the current food value chain; and
- development pressures.

There is a compelling need to build awareness of the value of this sector in relation to the provincial economy and implement strategies necessary to renew and grow this cluster.

According to research done for Local Food Plus, a Canadian non-profit organization bringing farmers and consumers together to build regional food economies, eating local food has a 3:1 economic impact on the local economy. Hence, increasing the consumption of locally grown and processed food will yield important benefits to the region.

Strategy: Grow the cluster by coordinating economic development, finding the voids, filling the gaps, and building on strengths in the Golden Horseshoe.

Action 1: Implement the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan.

2: Align and strengthen dedicated economic development and planning resources to support the food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe.

3: Develop solutions to close gaps in the infrastructure required to support the food and farming industry.

4: Expand existing and cultivate new markets by leveraging the cultural diversity of the Golden Horseshoe.



Photo credit: - http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3117/3130288692_16ce496b83.jpg?v=1230010043

"Collaboration among farmers, processors, retailers and research and innovation leaders is essential if we continue to be a highly productive and competitive sector. This plan sets the course for a new and innovative way of conducting business in agriculture and agri-food."

Donald Ziraldo, Past Chairman, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

B. LINK FOOD, FARMING AND HEALTH

Educate current and future consumers about the importance of locally sourced food and farming products for enhancing their health and well-being.

Access to nutritious, affordable, safe and culturally diverse food is one of the foundations for an active, healthy life.

Unhealthy eating leads to increased risks for serious and long-term chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. In 2003, Health Canada estimated the total economic burden of unhealthy choices in Canada at approximately $6.6 billion per year.

However, consumer trends indicate Canadians are making healthier food choices. An Angus Reid poll in February 2011 shows that 76% of Canadians are making healthier food choices compared to three years ago. People aged 55 and over led the pack, with 80% of them making healthier eating choices compared to 76% of those ages 35 to 54 and 73% among those ages 18 to 34.

Eating more fresh food was cited as the most common way people are improving their dietary habits; 42% of respondents were taking that approach as compared to 38% who said they had reduced their salt intake and 36% who have cut down on fat.

The poll also shows that about two-thirds of consumers are influenced by nutrition information on food packages while cost is cited as the largest barrier to buying healthy food.

Food safety is also a consumer concern and Canadians are increasingly wary of the safety of imported food products (Decima Poll, 2010). According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2011), over 70% of food products sold in Canada are imported and most of the domestic products contain imported ingredients. These products and ingredients come from more than 190 countries which have varying levels of food safety controls.



Photo credit: http://www.littlepiggy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/DSCN38371.jpg

"Food can play a powerful role in promoting health as well as building strong and diverse communities, protecting the environment and strengthening the economy. That's why food is such an effective vehicle to connect people to one another, to their neighbourhoods and their city."

Dr. David McKeown,
Medical Officer of Health,
City of Toronto, May 2010

Many of these imports take days or weeks to reach our shelves. Local food can be on our plates within hours and at peak freshness. While it is recognized that a healthy diet will include imported foods, increased consumption of local foods also provides additional benefits to our ecological systems.

Farmers and food processors in the Golden Horseshoe, with their wealth of healthy and safe product offerings, can have a vital role in meeting consumer demands, if the systems are in place to support the farm and food cluster.

Strategy: Work closely with a broad range of stakeholders to educate and inform consumers about healthy food products from Golden Horseshoe.

Action 1: Increase local food literacy with a focus on youth.

2: Secure the mandate for local health units within Golden Horseshoe communities to promote increased consumption of local food.

3: Expand the use, management and impact of the Foodland Ontario brand.

"Canada imports more than 53% of its vegetables and over 95% of its fruit. Red meat imports have risen 600% over the last 40 years. In fact, in 15 years, our food imports increased by 160% while Canada's population increased by only 15%. Ontario, with some of Canada's best farmland, has annual food imports valued at $4 billion – from bananas to more exotic citrus and other fresh and processed products. For each apple exported from Ontario, five are imported. For pears, the ratio is one exported for every 700 imported."
(EatRealEatLocal.ca)

Photo credit: http://greenfusestock.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/Farmers-Markets-The-People/G0000JFwPsl1Y26s/I0000iBQypdvkYsY



C. FOSTER INNOVATION

Encourage and support innovation to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster.

The keys to being competitive in today's world markets are innovation and flexibility. It is essential to implement new ways of doing business. The Golden Horseshoe has significant, broadly based research and innovation capacity focused within its boundaries that can help food and farming businesses to achieve this goal.

The Holland Marsh Muck Research Station focuses on specific attributes of the region. Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, established in 2007, provides a new collaborative model, representing industry, government and universities, to drive innovation and commercialization in horticulture. Numerous world class universities and colleges located in the region conduct leading research into issues related to health and well being. The MaRS Centre is in the Discovery District, between the country's leading teaching hospitals and three major universities. MaRS is one of Canada's 11 Centres of Excellence for Commercialization Research.

Businesses in the Golden Horseshoe have ready access to Guelph's outstanding agri-food research expertise. The Ontario Network of Excellence (ONE), is a province-wide team of member organizations that connect and enable active collaboration between the communities of science, business, government, academia to accelerate innovation processes. The ONE network has 14 facilities in Ontario including:

- The Regional Municipality of York, ventureLAB
- Niagara Region, Niagara Interacitve Media Generator (nGen)
- The Regional Municipality of Halton, HalTech Innovation Centre
- The Region of Peel, Research Innovation Commercialization Centre (RICC)
- The City of Toronto, MaRS Discovery District
- Durham, Innovation Durham Northumberland (IDN)
- Hamilton, Innovation Factory

Strategy: Position the agriculture, food processing, food retail and food service sector in the Golden Horseshoe as "the place to do business".

Action 1: Identify and develop avenues that provide access to business planning, capital, opportunities for market development and enable commercialization of new food and farming products.

2: Attract entrepreneurs and skilled people to the food and farming cluster.

3: Invest in training and applied research that supports and grows the cluster.

"We are in the consumer satisfaction business. To be successful, you have to innovate to meet the changing needs of Canadian consumers. We think that we have a better chance of being successful if we are innovating to address their concerns."

Richard Glover, President, Pepsico Beverages Canada (producers of juices made from Golden Horseshoe products), National Post, August 2, 2011

D. ENABLE THE CLUSTER

Align policy tools and their application to enable food and farming businesses to be increasingly competitive and profitable.

To attract and retain food and farming businesses, the Golden Horseshoe must be viewed as a desirable place to do business. Canada has a reputation for well-regulated businesses producing safe products. However, regulation can also result in frustrating delays and increased costs of doing business. Within the boundaries of the Golden Horseshoe there are seven regional governments and 36 local municipalities, each of which has a set of planning policies and regulations. Added to that are six conservation authorities and multiple provincial and federal agencies each with separate mandates and regulations. The process for doing business in this cumbersome regulated environment can be streamlined and the cost lowered without compromising public good.

"Farmers are Ontario's biggest land-owning business segment, and need to be at the table either personally or through elected representatives when decisions are made that affect farming."

Owen Roberts, University of Guelph, September 2011



Photo credit: Jamie Reaume

Strategy: Harmonize regulations, provide one-stop shopping for approvals and create an "open for business" environment.

Action 1: Harmonize and improve policy tools in the Golden Horseshoe (eg. provincial policies, Official Plans, taxation, regulations) for consistent implementation responsive to the needs of food and farming businesses.

2: Develop policies and programs to support profitability for food and farming businesses.

3: Establish a food and farming champion to drive a one-window approach in each region to enable food and farming businesses to succeed.

4: Align provincial and municipal taxes and fees to support food and farming businesses and innovation.

E. CULTIVATE NEW APPROACHES

Pilot new approaches to support food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe.

Farming in the Golden Horseshoe has its own set of challenges. Although there are advantages related to the good soil, moderate climate, and access to market, there are disadvantages associated with farming in an urban or near urban environment. The impacts of uncertainty and changing circumstances related to climate change, growth patterns and policy shifts must be considered. Steps need to be taken to build on the advantages and counter the disadvantages of farming in the Golden Horseshoe.

Greenbelts are works in progress around the world. There are valuable lessons to be learned and applied as the concept evolves. One of the prominent goals of greenbelts is to protect and promote food production; however when the Ontario Greenbelt was established, farmers within it were concerned that their interests were not addressed. This Action Plan will address those concerns, monitor the evolution of the Greenbelt and set up a mechanism for providing input to the scheduled 2015 review to ensure the Greenbelt supports food and farming.

The Golden Horseshoe has ideal conditions to try new pilot projects in both food and farming. New relationships and linkages between farmers and processors should be initiated. Small successes in the region can be monitored and scaled up for application in other areas. Partners who have never worked together in the past are now tackling larger issues.

"Ten years ago if anyone had suggested that I would be attending a farmer appreciation event hosted by the Regional Conservation Authority, I would have laughed at them. Yet, there I was, not only attending, but pleased to be making a presentation to celebrate the success of the Peel Rural Water Quality Program."

Nick Ferri, Chair, Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group and
Chair, Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee

Strategy: Be a leader in developing programs to support food and farming.

Action 1: Design, pilot and implement a system to acknowledge and reward businesses within the food and farming sector for providing ecological goods and services.

2: Develop and implement realistic local food, beverage, bioproduct and ornamental procurement policies for public and broader public sector agencies.

3: Conduct research and pilot projects specifically designed for urban and near urban areas of the Golden Horseshoe.

4: Actively participate in review of the Greenbelt in 2015.

IMPLEMENTATION

Developing this plan has been an interactive process involving representatives from the public, government and all components of the food and farming cluster. We have listened to these partners, consulted with leaders in the industry and held a Summit to solicit input and suggestions. Our plan is built on what we have heard.

Our five major strategies, confirmed at the Summit, have been divided into eighteen actions which have been subdivided into a series of tasks as outlined on the following pages of this document. Breaking the strategies down in this way allows targeted plans to be developed for implementation.

These targeted plans are summarized as a broader implementation strategy in which we have identified potential partners, proposed timelines for completion of each task and established measures of success. The **"Implementation Strategy"** can be found at www.gtaaac.ca.

This plan and our implementation strategy are living documents. As we move forward, we will expand our partnerships. Revisions and adjustments will be made as tasks are finished and new ones are begun. However the plan will be the foundation for our work. Working within the ten year timeframe and using the established measures of success will keep us focused and inspired.



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A. GROW THE CLUSTER

Strategy

Grow the cluster by coordinating economic development, finding the voids, filling the gaps, and building on strengths in the Golden Horseshoe.

Action

1
Implement the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan.

2
Align and strengthen dedicated economic development and planning resources to support the food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe.

3
Develop solutions to close gaps in the infrastructure required to support the food and farming industry

4
Expand existing and cultivate new markets by leveraging the cultural diversity of the Golden Horseshoe.

Tasks

- Create the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA) after determining effective governance arrangements to oversee implementation of the Action Plan.
- Develop communications plan and materials
- Deliver a call to action to engage partners and key stakeholders.
- Confirm committed, capable partners who can deliver results.
- Proactively facilitate and monitor implementation of Action Plan.
- Report on outcomes to partners and stakeholders and celebrate wins regularly.

- Ensure our municipal partners in the Golden Horseshoe have a committed food and farming economic development function.
- Align economic development and planning roles to enable sector growth.
- Support establishment of a forum where economic development officers and planners work together with their provincial and federal counterparts.

- Identify the production, processing, distribution and marketing infrastructure required to achieve integration between different parts of the cluster.
- Complete and maintain an inventory of existing production, processing, distribution and marketing infrastructure that supports food and farming activities.
- Identify gaps in infrastructure that are inhibiting growth in food and farming operations.
- Attract investment to create or renew infrastructure to address identified needs.

- Review existing documentation and research on ethnic markets and identify research gaps
- Undertake demand analysis for world foods in the Golden Horseshoe.
- Identify and target food retailers, food processors and foodservice to test Golden Horseshoe products for domestic and global markets.
- Communicate the findings of domestic demand analysis and international opportunities to key businesses in the value chain.

B. LINK FOOD, FARMING AND HEALTH

Strategy

Work closely with a broad range of stakeholders to educate and inform consumers about healthy food products from the Golden Horseshoe.

Action

1
Increase local food literacy with a focus on youth.

2
Secure the mandate for local health units within Golden Horseshoe communities to promote increased consumption of local food.

3
Expand the use, management and impact of the Foodland Ontario brand.

Tasks

- Investigate and compile listing of current programming being offered relating to food literacy.
- Design and offer updated activities through the primary and secondary education system to engage students in healthy nutrition, agricultural awareness and good food choices.
- Support and promote school breakfast and lunch programs that encourage healthy food choices using local food products.
- Support and promote healthy local food choices by food service providers at colleges and universities.
- Support and promote healthy local food choices to youth.

- Assist Public Health staff to educate the community about the contribution that local food makes to healthy eating choices.
- Encourage marketing of Golden Horseshoe food and food products in health promotion programs.

- Expand the Ontario branding to include value added products using locally grown ingredients.
- Support labeling innovation that gives consumers more information about local food choices such as point of origin, date of harvest and processing activity.
- Encourage increased on-going training of store staff to provide accurate representation of local foods.
- Conduct public campaigns aimed at informing consumers about local food and ornamental product choices.

C. FOSTER INNOVATION

Strategy

Position the agriculture, food processing, food retail and food service sector in the Golden Horseshoe as "the place to do business".

Action

1
Identify and develop avenues that provide access to business planning, capital, opportunities for market development and enable commercialization of new food and farming products.

2
Attract entrepreneurs and skilled people to the food and farming cluster.

3
Invest in training and applied research that supports and grows the cluster.

Tasks

- Communicate and build awareness among key stakeholder groups to support the action.
- Complete an inventory of commodities and processing capabilities available in the Golden Horseshoe in order to match buyers with sellers of food and farming products.
- Support incubators that provide access to capital, processing line time and expert advice for entrepreneurs in food and farming.
- Work with food retailers to develop an innovation marketplace where new products can be introduced to consumers rapidly and cost effectively for evaluation and testing.
- Create a pool of government and private sector funds, to focus on investing in priorities such as gaps in food and farming infrastructure and technologies that are targeted to growth markets.

- Market the Golden Horseshoe as the place to invest in food and farming.
- Develop cooperative, internships, apprenticeships, scholarship and mentoring programs that introduce students to careers in food and farming.
- Encourage the development of a seed fund to compete globally for innovative and talented entrepreneurs and researchers in food and farming

- Work closely with the food and faming sector to ensure that the Ontario colleges and universities are providing knowledge and skills that meet the needs of the sector.
- Build awareness and support for publicly funded applied research that will give food and farming firms in the Golden Horseshoe cluster a competitive advantage in production and marketing

D. ENABLE THE CLUSTER

Strategy

Harmonize regulations, provide one-stop shopping for approvals and create an "open for business" environment.

Action

1
Harmonize and improve policy tools in the Golden Horseshoe (e.g. provincial policies, Official Plans, taxation, regulations) for consistent implementation responsive to the needs of food and farming businesses.

2
Develop policies and programs to support profitability for food and farming businesses.

3
Establish a food and farming champion to drive a one-window approach in each region to enable food and farming businesses to succeed.

4
Align provincial and municipal taxes and fees to support food and farming businesses and innovation.

Tasks

- Encourage jurisdictions responsible for land and water management within the Golden Horseshoe to harmonize regulations in a manner that is responsive to the needs of near urban, urban and rural farming operations.
- Review regulations and policies to identify issues and conflicts, and work to resolve them.
- Update land use policy to provide flexibility for value retention and valued added food and farming businesses. (e.g. similar to Niagara Region)
- Use various planning tools (e.g. community improvement plan approach) to foster supports to farming.
- Enhance coordination 'Farm Fresh' and 'Culinary Trail' programs to showcase the celebration of farming to residents, tourists and visitors to the region.
- Appoint a senior official in each municipal jurisdiction to assist food and farming entrepreneurs to navigate approval processes and provide feedback to all regulatory authorities on ways to expedite review and approval processes.
- Define on-farm value retention and value added activities as agricultural uses for taxation purposes.
- Work to secure property taxation policies that encourage long-term land rental agreements for agriculture.
- Standardize development charges for buildings used for agricultural purposes throughout the Golden Horseshoe.
- Encourage and enhance financial incentives for innovation in food processing sector

E. CULTIVATE NEW APPROACHES

Strategy

Be a leader in developing programs to support food and farming.

Action

1
Design, pilot and implement a system to acknowledge and reward businesses within the food and farming sector for providing ecological goods and services.

2
Develop and implement realistic local food, beverage, bio-product and ornamental procurement policies for public and broader public sector agencies.

3
Conduct research and pilot projects specifically designed for urban and near urban areas of the Golden Horseshoe.

4
Actively participate in review of the Greenbelt in 2015.

Tasks

- Research, design, pilot and implement different approaches to acknowledge and reward farmers for the provision of ecological goods and services.
- Design and implement a program to educate the public about food and farming environmental best practices.
- Establish a program, at the Golden Horseshoe regional level, to acknowledge and promote environmentally progressive practices in the food and farming sector.

- Develop and disseminate consistent, realistic local food, beverage, bio-product and ornamentals procurement policies for public agencies.
- Monitor implementation of procurement policies and changes in procurement.
- Create a recognition program for broader public sector for best practices in food procurement.

- Track the trends (e.g. shifting demographics and preferences, changing climate, international trade and economic conditions and development pressures) and assess impacts on food and farming.
- Promote research into varietal choices, growing practices, harvest handling, alternative energy and processing practices in the region.
- Track trends related to green spaces, community gardens and urban agriculture.
- Develop a land rental agreement that permits long-term secure rental of public lands for food production.
- Maintain and preserve agricultural production on public lands including the new Rouge Park.

- Prepare a credible position for improvements to the Greenbelt Plan policies and/or their implementation from a food and farming perspective.
- Track relevant indicators inside and outside Greenbelt to assess its impact on the food and farming sector.
- Engage the food and farming sector to prepare for and be part of the review process.

MOVING FORWARD

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

While other groups and agencies are already addressing many of the issues that have been identified here, their actions are being taken in separate silos. Coordination, cooperation and maximizing use of resources will be key requirements in implementing this action plan. Building on and not duplicating existing efforts, the plan will achieve success through cooperation among partners. The plan will be aligned with complementary initiatives such as the National Food Strategy. Not static, the plan is dynamic and living like the cluster it promotes. Therefore, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021 must be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.

LEADERSHIP

Because the implementation of the Action Plan involves a series of actions that will occur under the leadership of different champions, there will be a vital role for an overarching body committed to monitoring the process, working with the partners on their different tracks, measuring success and making adjustments when required. In order to implement the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021, a new governance model will be created.

Comprised of representatives of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, the City of Hamilton, the Greenbelt Foundation and the Region of Niagara, the **Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA)** will include farmers, industry representatives, land use planners, economic development officers, politicians and agency representatives, all with a common interest: fostering the food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe. To oversee the implementation of this Action Plan, support from the seven senior municipal governments in the Golden Horseshoe, committed partners at the provincial and federal levels, and the food and farming cluster will be essential.

"Agriculture is the backbone of a strong and healthy Canada. It's one of this country's top five industries, contributes $130 billion to our economy each year and provides one in eight jobs. The bottom line is that agriculture matters to Canada."

Greg Stewart, President and CEO of Farm Credit Canada, August 30, 2011



Photo credit: http://www.ontariofoodcluster.com/

SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

To be successful, the actions must be implemented by:

- Assigning lead responsibilities to committed, capable partners who can provide the necessary leadership, sustain consensus and achieve results;
- Establishing clear goals and corresponding measures for success;
- Establishing timelines for important implementation milestones; and
- Monitoring progress achieved, reporting on outcomes, and celebrating wins.

NEXT STEPS

There is much to be done. We are determined that in 10 years we will have achieved our vision. We are convinced that the Golden Horseshoe will be:

- globally renowned as a vibrant food and farming cluster, characterized by profitable farming operations and a thriving hub of food processing, food retail and food service businesses; and
- recognized and valued for its extensive research capacity, innovative technology, and a wide range of healthy and safe products.



http://www.greenbelt.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/halton-0846.jpg

Steering Committee Membership

Nick Ferri
Chair, GTA AAC , Peel Federation of Agriculture

Peter Lambrick
Chair, Steering Committee for Food and Farming: An Action Plan 2021, Halton Region Federation of Agriculture

Sue Monarch
City of Hamilton

Fiona Nelson
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Jamie Reaume
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Golden Horseshoe Agriculture & Agri-Food Strategy

Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021

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