Reforming the Local Food Act:
The Establishment of a Local Food System in Ontario

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Abstract

Since November 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2013, the \textit{Local Food Act (LFA)} has been the governing piece of legislation pertaining to local food in Ontario. However, it has become evident that the \textit{Act} is largely an aspirational piece of legislation, resulting in two salient problems. First, it does not resolve the two fundamental issues associated with the supply of local food to Ontarians: convenience and seasonal availability. Second, the \textit{LFA} does not mandate hard targets for institutional spending on local food, on the grounds that doing so would be too prescriptive. Thus, the purpose of this briefing note is to provide the Minister with a new set of strategies that will convince major food retailers to supply more local food in their stores. This note will also substantiate why the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) should set hard targets for institutional and Broader Public Sector (BPS) spending on local food products. The overall objective is to outline how the Government of Ontario can facilitate the creation of a sustainable local food system (LFS) within the province.
MEMORANDUM TO:
Kathleen Wynne
Minister, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food

FROM:
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DATE:
December 15, 2013

SUBJECT:
The Establishment of a Local Food System in Ontario

Introduction: The purpose of this briefing note is to provide the Minister with a new set of strategies that will encourage major food retailers to supply more local food in their stores. This note will also substantiate why the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) should set hard targets for institutional and Broader Public Sector (BPS) spending on local food. The overall objective is to outline how the Government of Ontario can facilitate the creation of a sustainable local food system (LFS) within the province.

Issues: Since November 5th, 2013, the Local Food Act (LFA) has been the governing piece of legislation pertaining to local food in Ontario. The central directive of the LFA is to increase local food awareness, and to boost sales by setting local food goals in consultation with agri-food sector partners.1 The key aspects of the LFA are:

- a non-refundable tax credit of 25% for farmers who donate their surplus harvest to eligible community food programs;
- a Local Food Week that will take place annually, beginning the first Monday in June;
- the requirement that the Ontario government produce an annual report on its activities to support local food; and,
- the creation of a Local Food Fund, which is part of a $30 million investment from the province to create jobs, and support innovative local food projects over the next three years.

Despite these goals, it has become evident that the LFA is largely an aspirational piece of legislation, resulting in two salient issues. First, the Act does not resolve the fundamental problems associated with the supply of local food to Ontarians: convenience and seasonal availability. Second, the LFA does not mandate hard targets for institutional spending on local food, on the grounds that doing so would be too prescriptive.2

These two interrelated issues reflect that while the OMAF has actively promoted local food since its inception, it has been less successful in formulating concrete strategies to facilitate convenient access to locally available foods. If the OMAF can achieve this, though, it could create a

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1 Ontario, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Bill to Promote Local Food Passes Final Vote, News Release, November 5, 2013.

sustainable LFS in Ontario, which is defined here as a system that facilitates improved connections between Ontario farmers, BPS organizations, and the major grocery chains within the province (i.e. Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro).

It is important to note that the support of provincial LFSs across Canada has not been cited as a policy priority by the federal government. Yet there are approximately 51,950 registered farms in Ontario alone, producing more than 200 commodities, including fruits, vegetables, livestock, dairy, poultry, grains, and oilseeds. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the government of Ontario, specifically the OMAF, to implement policy initiatives designed to increase the supply of local products in major retailers and public institutions.

**Local Food Movement in Ontario:** The LFA emerged in response to a recent surge in interest for local food by Ontarians. In 2007, a Greenbelt Foundation survey found that 79% of Ontarian consumers prefer to buy locally grown food, 71% are willing to pay more, and 91% would buy more local food if it was made more convenient. In response, the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) also conducted research on local food movements across the country. They identified 2,314 local food initiatives in Canada, 641 of which are located in Ontario. These include the creation of farmers’ markets, community supported agricultural (CSA) initiatives, efforts by major retailers to supply local products, and provincial commitments to increase institutional spending on local food.

Similarly, the Bank of Montreal’s Annual Food Survey found that Canadians attempt to buy locally grown vegetables more than other products. Ontarians, in particular, tend to buy locally grown fruit more than shoppers in other provinces, and are supporting Ontario’s growing wine industry by purchasing local wine 40% of the time. These statistics substantiate the claim that the demand for local food within the province has increased, thereby justifying the pursuit of government policies that will create a LFS in Ontario.

**Benefits of Local Food Systems:** Facilitating linkages between farmers, major retailers, and Ontario’s BPS has several positive implications. First, there is evidence that the supply and purchase of local food has economic benefits. That is, a greater portion of the farming and food dollar is retained in the local economy through import substitution, thereby creating a multiplier

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4 Ibid.

5 Mike Schreiner, “Partnering for Local Food: the LFP Approach,” *Local Food Plus* (October 2008), 3.


8 Ibid.
effect. In Ontario, the agri-food sector contributes approximately $34 billion to the economy, and supports more than 750,000 jobs across the province. In fact, a Northumberland study estimated that if every Ontario family shifted $10 of their weekly grocery budget to food grown in the province, it would boost home-grown agri-business by $2.4 billion annually, and create 10,000 new jobs.

Some food experts also claim that local food improves health and nutrition, as local food items are allegedly fresher, less processed, and retain more nutrients than items that are non-local. In addition, experts argue that the creation of strong LFSs may increase the availability of healthy food items in a community, and encourage consumers to make healthier food choices. Admittedly, whether local food is superior in terms of nutritional value and taste is a contentious issue, as few empirical studies have validated these claims. It is confirmed, though, that LFSs allow consumers to connect with producers, and better understand the origins and benefits of their food sources. Moreover, enhanced food security is achieved, in that Ontarians become less dependent on food imports from the United States (US), and less vulnerable to breaks in the food distribution chain.

Finally, many academics contend that LFSs facilitate environmentally sustainable food distribution networks. Advocates of localization of the food system argue that reducing transport distances for food can attenuate the deleterious effects of fossil fuel energy use, pollution, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on the environment. Currently, the province imports $4 billion more in food than it exports, and these products travel an average distance of 4500 kilometres to reach Ontario consumers. However, given the abundance of locally available alternatives within the province, often referred to as the 100-Mile-Diet, it is unnecessary for many imports to be shipped such great distances.

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10 Ontario, Office of the Premier, Shifting to Local Food will Create 10,000 Ontario Jobs, (News Release, October 4, 2013)

11 Ibid.


13 Ibid.


16 Martinez, “Local Food Systems,” 47.

17 Wylie-Toal et al., “Local Food Provision,” 5.
Farmers, Distributors, and Supply Chains: The increasing demand for local food, and the aforementioned benefits associated with a LFS, necessitates an examination of how local food is currently supplied within Ontario. There are two distinct supply chains, each of which has different trading partner relationships and transactions that deliver local food from the producer to the consumer. First, there is the conventional supply chain, which includes major retailers, wholesalers, and BPS organizations. Second, there is an emerging alternative supply chain, which is comprised of farmers’ markets, CSA initiatives, and food hubs, such as the Ontario Food Terminal (OFT).

Farmers and small-scale distributors (SMEs) are largely confined to the alternative supply chain, as it is the direct marketing strategy that aligns with their production capacity. Farmers’ markets have grown from 60 in 1990 to 181 by 2012, while direct sales at those markets have increased 7.3% annually. In the same time period, documented CSA initiatives have surged from 0 to 228 in 2012, including a 50% increase in the last two years. Within a CSA, the consumer becomes a partner with a farm by pre-purchasing a share of the farm’s seasonal harvest, which is delivered to designated drop-off points on a weekly basis. In 2012, Ontario farms reported $10 billion in farm outputs, comprising only 25% of the market. This figure reflects the smaller scale of SMEs, and their limited impact on the market through the alternative supply chain.

Medium- and large-sized distributors, however, operate within the conventional supply chain, and control between 60-70% of the market for local food. There are two main types: food distributors and group purchasing organizations (GPOs), both of which deal almost exclusively with large retailers. There are approximately 3,000 distributors in Ontario, ranging from multinational corporations to locally developed firms. For example, Gordon Food Service Ontario is a division of Gordon Food Service (GFS), a major North American food service distributor. In response to customer demand, and financial support from the Greenbelt Fund, GFS Ontario is actively working to expand its local food offerings. With over $800 million in annual sales, GFS Ontario demonstrates that medium- and large-sized distributors currently provide the bulk of local food to provincial consumers.

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 43.

23 Ibid.


Admittedly, SMEs and large distributors are not restricted to either the alternative or conventional supply chains. Instead, a hybrid system has developed, whereby many possible marketing channels and opportunities exist in Ontario’s growing local food economy. These opportunities have created an environment where producers of all types and scale can gain access to Ontario consumers, and engage with local markets in varying scales of production. However, major retailers, such as Loblaws and Ontario’s BPS, often prefer to deal with large distributors. This is demonstrative of their desire for efficiencies in delivery, and reflects the prevailing view that large distributors are better equipped than SMEs to provide local food that is affordable and meets government food safety regulations.

At times, though, even provincially based large distributors can be shut out of the market, especially when it is deemed cheaper by major retailers to import from a low-cost producer. Part of this is due to the misperception that local food is automatically more expensive, despite the fact that the price of local food is complex and changes depending on regional location, sales outlet, season, and supply. These extant factors ‘crowd out’ the involvement of local farmers and distributors, many of which are not given the opportunity to sell their products through major retailers.

**Major Grocery Retailers:** While grocery stores are increasingly marketing local foods from SMEs and provincially based distributors, the majority of their supply is typically not local. This is problematic, given that large retailers play an integral role in the creation of an LFS in Ontario, as they allow consumers to conveniently access local products. While direct marketing channels for local food have grown significantly in the last ten years, the vast majority of food purchased by Canadian consumers still comes from large retail chains. As of 2012, the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors reports that Loblaws, Metro, and Sobeys supply approximately 78% of the food distributed to consumers through grocery channels. Moreover, the CCA found that for every $100 of household food expenditure, the consumer spent $77.60 through these three major retailers.

Critics may point out that most grocery stores have developed specialized procurement policies to source locally grown food. For example, Loblaws, which currently controls 35% of the food market in Ontario, has emerged with an allegedly ambitious local food campaign. The ‘Grown Close to Home’ initiative stipulates that 40% of Loblaws produce will be locally sourced year-

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28 Ibid.


Metro has a similar program, entitled ‘Harvest from Home’, while Sobeys has its ‘Better Food for All’ campaign. Despite the good intentions of these programs, they are flawed for several reasons.

‘Local’ Definitional Complexities: The local food procurement policies utilized by the major retailers have largely undermined the creation of a LFS in Ontario. More specifically, the campaigns adopted by Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro fail to mention that the corporate definition of ‘local’ differs from the definition enumerated in the LFA, and the definition adopted by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

The CFIA and the Act both define ‘local’ as food and beverages produced in the province or territory in which it is sold. Yet the major retailers’ definition of ‘local’ encompasses a broader geographic area, including food products from neighboring provinces and states. For instance, studies found that ‘Grown Close to Home’ signs at a Loblaws in Nova Scotia were placed with plums and radishes from the US, as well as peaches and nectarines from Ontario. In fact, there is only limited evidence that Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro are stocking and promoting ‘local’ (i.e. provincial) food, preferring instead to supply produce that matches the lower procurement costs and efficiency gains required by their business model.

Furthermore, only a small percentage of the produce in chain grocery stores is able to satisfy their broad interpretation of ‘local’. For example, in Loblaws only 27% of agricultural products are from local (i.e. Canadian) producers, far short of the 80-100% demanded by Ontario consumers, many of whom assume that local refers to food produced within provincial borders. Moreover, the three major retailers deal with only 600 SME farmers and large distributors across Canada, relative to the 51,950 farming operations in Ontario alone. In their defence, major firms often argue that local suppliers cannot ensure the necessary volumes of food required throughout the year. However, these firms avoid purchasing the technology that would allow their distributors to transform local produce into case-ready products for retail.

In short, the lack of access by Ontario farmers to conventional supply chains, coupled with the lack of actual local products in convenient locations, precludes them from conveniently marketing to local customers. Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro need to reconfigure their supply

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37 Wylie-Toal et al., “Local Food Provision,” 8.
38 Ibid., 8.
systems to accommodate provincial producers, to allow the volume of genuinely local food that they stock to increase over time.\textsuperscript{40} Genuine labels indicating that a product is local (i.e. within province) also need to be provided, potentially through a third-party. One option is the non-profit group Local Food Plus (LFP), a Toronto-based organization that offers sustainable production and processing certification, and assists regional farmers and food processors to carve out new local markets.\textsuperscript{41} This option will be further explored in the recommendations section.

**Local Food Seasonal Availability:** It is evident that seasonality prevents Ontario’s suppliers from providing their products year-round. Moreover, the processes for selecting and contracting with suppliers create challenges for incorporating local food into the conventional supply chain.\textsuperscript{42} In both the public and private sectors, contracts are generally designed to select distributors that can provide consistent volume across the corporation’s provincial locations at competitive prices, neglecting other factors such as quality, taste, or local sourcing.\textsuperscript{43} This selection process disadvantages local producers, who are constrained by seasonality.

Bids for contracts are generally received through a request for proposals process (RFP). However, the negotiation of an RFP can be difficult, requiring specialized knowledge to complete successfully. Furthermore, RFPs are not always advertised through the channels that reach local producers and suppliers, and may be offered by invitation only.\textsuperscript{44} Once a contract is finalized, retailers and BPS institutions are restricted to purchasing from the list of approved suppliers.\textsuperscript{45} Admittedly, the seasonality of local food in Ontario is a reality that is beyond the scope of the OMAF. Nevertheless, efforts can be made to ensure that the OMAF’s promotional bodies, Foodland and Ontariofresh.ca, consistently advertise to Ontarians and retailers which products are in season. In addition, initiatives can be undertaken which simplify the RFP process, to ensure that crop yields are maximized and then distributed through either the alternative or conventional supply chain.

**Institutional Spending on Local Food:** As previously mentioned, the *LFA* does not require that public institutions have established procurement policies for local foods, due to the notion that such policies would be too prescriptive.\textsuperscript{46} This is surprising, given that other jurisdictions have passed similar legislation that explicitly sets hard targets for public sector institutional spending. For example, in 2007 Nova Scotia passed the *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act*, which supports and encourages local food consumption. As a result, the province has set a

\textsuperscript{40} Jones, Comfort, and Hillier, “Local Food and the UK,” 35.

\textsuperscript{41} Fiona N. Louden, and Rod J. MacRae, “Federal Regulation of Local and Sustainable Food Claims in Canada: A Case Study of Local Food Plus,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 27 (2010), 178.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 52.

goal that by 2020, 20% of Nova Scotian food expenditure will be spent on locally produced goods.\textsuperscript{47} The government has also instituted a number of environmentally responsible procurement practices, to support the purchase of local agricultural products in provincial healthcare and justice institutions.\textsuperscript{48}

The Nova Scotian case demonstrates that BPS organizations can create a market for local products from SME producers. This facilitates the inclusion of local food into the conventional supply chain, thereby creating opportunities for SMEs outside of direct marketing strategies.\textsuperscript{49} Similarly, if an LFS is established within Ontario, provincial residents will have improved access to local food through their public sector institutions. This is imperative, as it has become evident that nutrition-related chronic diseases cause approximately 16,000 deaths in Ontario.\textsuperscript{50} Part of this is due to the consumption of imported products that are high in trans-fat and sodium, some of which are available in public institutions.\textsuperscript{51} Consequently, the OMAF and BPS organizations should actively look for ways to increase their procurement of healthy local food alternatives, particularly when such products are in season and when it is cost-effective to do so.\textsuperscript{52} Two recent initiatives by the BPS illustrate that this approach is not only economically feasible, but beneficial for farmers and consumers.

**Health-Care Facilities:** Healthcare is a large and perpetually growing aspect of Ontario. There are over 800 facilities providing both acute and long-term care (LTC) services to the province’s 13.2 million residents every year.\textsuperscript{53} With 30,000 hospital beds and over 75,000 LTC beds at close to 100% occupancy, Ontario’s healthcare system serves an estimated 115,000,000 meals to patients every year.\textsuperscript{54} The total cost to deliver food service programs in hospitals and LTC facilities is estimated at $1.1 billion, while the value of the food served is estimated to be over $285,000,000.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, it is evident that the healthcare system represents a potentially lucrative market for farmers and distributors that produce local food.

One BPS organization that sought out local producers is the Nutrition Group at St. Joseph’s Health System, which formed a Group Purchasing Organization (SJHS-GPO). The group was granted permission by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to include explicit local food language in their RFPs, meeting government requirements that food procurement be \textsuperscript{47} Nova Scotia, *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act*, 2007, c. 7, s. 1.


\textsuperscript{49} Edge, “Cultivating Opportunities,” 43.

\textsuperscript{50} Don Drummond, Dominic Giroux, Susan Pigott, and Carol Stephenson, “Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services,” *Queen’s Printer for Ontario* (2012), 195.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Wylie-Toal et al., “Local Food Provision,” 5.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 6.
neutral’.\(^{56}\) The group works on behalf of 16 members, representing 28 facilities that stretch from London to St. Catherines.\(^{57}\) Patients are now provided local products, including beef from VG Meats in Norfolk County. However, the SJHS-GPO represents only a small portion of the 800 health-care facilities across the province. As a result, the expansion of such partnerships, and pursuit of local RFPs, ought to be encouraged by the OMAF.

**Post-Secondary Institutions:** At least two universities in Ontario have adopted local food procurement policies. In 2006, the University of Toronto announced that Aramark and Chartwells Corporations had won bids to provide food services to the 60,000 students on its three campuses. The contract specifies that 65% of the food provided must be local and certified with an LFP label.\(^{58}\) Similarly, at the University of Guelph, Hospitality Services adopted a policy that 50% of campus food is purchased from the Elmira Produce Auction Co-operative (EPAC), University of Guelph farms, and many other local suppliers.\(^{59}\) Efforts are also being made to buy from large distributors, such as Don’s Produce, which stores local food beyond the season to ensure local products remain on the menu long after the harvest has ended.

These two examples, in health and education public sectors, reflect that BPS institutional spending on local food has created a collaborative and flexible model, one that gives corporations and SME farmers the opportunity to ‘scale up’ from the alternative to conventional supply chain.\(^{60}\) If the *LFA* were to include hard targets for local food procurement across other BPS organizations (e.g. public schools), it would facilitate additional opportunities for farmers and distributors to scale up, benefiting both the producer and Ontarians who access these public institutions.

**Recommendations:** The following are a set of strategies for the Government of Ontario and the OMAF, each designed to facilitate the creation of a LFS within the province. A sustainable LFS will provide SME farmers and large distributors greater access to conventional supply chains, including the three major retailers and BPS organizations.

1. The Ontario government should amend the *LFA* to include a provision which overcomes the definitional complexities associated with the term ‘local’. Consistent with the current definition enumerated in the *LFA* and the CFIA, local ought to be defined as ‘within province’. Since labelling claims are currently voluntary, The OMAF should require producers and retailers to abide by the provincial definition when labelling their products. Failure to do so should result in penalties, deterring retailers from misleading Ontario consumers, and ensuring that products labelled as ‘local’ align with consumer expectations.

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{58}\) Harriet Friedman, “Scaling up: Bringing Public Institutions and Food Service Corporations into the Project for a Local, Sustainable Food System in Ontario,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 24 (2007), 350.


\(^{60}\) Friedman, “Scaling Up,” 392.
2. To facilitate producer and retailer compliance with the aforementioned labelling law, the OMAF could begin a partnership with Local Food Plus. LFP can assume responsibility for labelling all products in Ontario that want to be labelled as ‘locally sourced’. This saves major retailers the cost of internally labelling products as local, and reduces the misuse of the term. These labels can also allow producers to differentiate their products from their non-local counterparts by including additional information (e.g. personal history, nutritional value, recipes, etc.). Producers who can effectively promote the perceived added-value associated with their local foods may have a competitive advantage in the marketplace, and may be more appealing to retailers looking to stock niche goods.

3. The OMAF should use aggregator facilitation strategies to allow SME producers and small distributors to collectively organize themselves, so that they may scale-up into the conventional supply chain. For example, BC Tree Fruits is a cooperative of 580 Okanagan tree fruit growers. A cooperative arrangement allows Loblaws stores in BC to purchase fruit from all 580 growers using a single purchase order, giving the company a large volume of product with a simple procurement process. A similar procedure could be used by local Ontarian producers in partnership with Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro, particularly for small producers of dairy, meat, or fruit and vegetable products. This would allow consumers more convenient access to local food products, through their preferred retailer.

4. Since it is impractical to ensure that all 51,950 farmers in Ontario will join the conventional supply chain, the OMAF should ensure that SME producers have access to direct marketing strategies across the province, such as farmers’ markets and CSA initiatives. To do this, the Ministry should partner with the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association, to build hubs comparable to the OFT along the Greenbelt. In terms of financing, the government could gather funds through the Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF), to support the creation of these new local food terminals. This will allow SMEs and small distributors to have improved access to the alternative supply chain, given their personal needs and capacity restrictions.

5. To ameliorate the issues associated with seasonal ‘availability’, the OMAF should pursue three approaches. First, it should simplify the institutional RFP process and encourage private retailers to take similar steps. The OMAF should also allow for joint RFPs to be drafted among several farmers and distributors. These joint RFPs can then be advertised to the major retailers by the OMAF, in-line with the cooperative arrangement previously mentioned.

Second, the government should subsidize the installation of technologies by farmers and distributors that would allow product yields to be maximized and stored in advanced facilities, allowing seasonal foods to be purchased months after the harvest has ended (e.g. local raspberries). Finally, it is important to educate consumers and retailers on seasonal availability, and on the locations and products of local producers. The Foodland Ontario website currently

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61 J. Dara Bloom, and C. Clare Hinrichs, “Moving Local Food Through Conventional System Infrastructure: Value Chain Framework Comparisons and Insights,” Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems 26, No. 1 (September 2010), 14.

62 Ibid.

provides seasonality guides, but does not provide farm-specific information.\textsuperscript{64} Farmers should be able to use the Foodland website as a hub through which they can register their contact information, seasonal products, history, and other pertinent details.

6. The \textit{LFA} should be amended to include hard targets on institutional spending, to better facilitate Ontarians’ access to local food across the BPS. To do this, the OMAF ought to collaborate with the various Ministries to set achievable targets that do not unduly burden the organization, and cannot be misconstrued as overly prescriptive. The efforts made by the SJHS-GPO, and the Universities of Toronto and Guelph, can serve as a benchmark for future procurement policies. For instance, greater BPS local food procurement is possible through the insertion of local food language in RFPs drafted by ministry officials. Ultimately, public sector outreach to local food producers provides the opportunity for SMEs and small distributors to ‘scale up’, from alternative to conventional supply chains. As a result, more Ontarians will have access to local food, via the BPS organizations that they primarily deal with.

7. The Ministry should expand the functions of Foodland Ontario and Ontario\textit{fresh}.ca, its consumer promotion programs. Their marketing capabilities can be used to dispel the notion that local food is unequivocally more expensive, as retailers often argue that consumers are not willing to pay a premium for local foods. While it is true that local food can be more expensive due to factors such as production costs, seasonality, and supply, several studies suggest that this is not always the case. Retailers should be provided comprehensive breakdowns of price-comparisons between local and non-local food products, to better inform their local food policies. Furthermore, some researchers claim that Ontarians have a higher ‘willingness to pay’ for local foods, meaning that retailers initial concerns may be unfounded.\textsuperscript{65} While this needs to be confirmed through additional surveys, these could be conducted by Foodland and Ontario\textit{fresh}.ca.

\textbf{Policy Communication:} For these recommendations to be successful, it is imperative that the OMAF appropriately frame the debate regarding the establishment of a LFS in Ontario. In communicating these initiatives, the OMAF should highlight the economic, social, and environmental benefits of a LFS. It should also emphasize that Ontarians have demonstrated they want improved access to local food, as evidenced by the Greenbelt Foundation survey, and the wide-spread public and political support for the \textit{LFA}. To ensure this information is accurate, the OMAF should conduct local food surveys on an annual basis. These updated surveys will provide demographic information that may convince the major grocery chains to seek out SMEs, allowing these farmers to better access the conventional supply chain.

The OMAF also needs to be willing to implement these recommendations in collaboration with the food industry’s existing local food initiatives (e.g. Loblaws’ Grown Close to Home). While many of their efforts are flawed, major retailers are undoubtedly responding to Ontarians’ demand for fresh, seasonal food. In many cases, retailers that successfully market local food recognize the considerable financial benefits. However, the government needs to be aware that

\textsuperscript{64}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 17.
local food creates challenges for retailers, as they rely on economies of scale to be competitive. The goal of the OMAF should not be to dismantle such programs, but to innovate or build upon these pre-existing structures to gain industry compliance, and create an on-going dialogue with grocery chains. Creating long-lasting partnerships between the three major retailers, SMEs, and large distributors in Ontario is the key to a successful LFS within the province, as doing so overcomes the extant issues associated with the convenience and availability of local food.

Finally, the OMAF should publicly reiterate its understanding that non-local food is necessary to give Ontarians their expected year-round access to a wide variety of foods (e.g. bananas). As a net agricultural exporter, Ontario benefits from a global food system (GFS). Consequently, it is important to assure provincial consumers, members of the opposition, and the federal government, that a LFS in Ontario will not damage trade relations with the US, our primary trading partner and dominant food importer.

**Conclusion:** The recommendations enumerated within this briefing note are not an attempt to eliminate imported foods or to remove Ontario from the GFS. Instead, the objective of this briefing note has been to reconcile the shortcomings of the LFA by advising the government as to how it can create a sustainable LFS in Ontario. In short, the principle goal of the OMAF should be to create an LFS in Ontario that is not merely aspirational, but one that better connects local food suppliers with major retailers and BPS organizations.

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66 Ibid., 47.


I would like to thank Don Drummond, Matthews Fellow and Adjunct Professor at the School of Policy Studies at Queen’s University. His critical comments and helpful suggestions significantly improved this paper, and I am very grateful for his contributions. I must also thank Sharath Voleti and the editorial team of the Queen’s Policy Review, for their tireless efforts in compiling this volume, and for all their support and encouragement over the course of the 2013-14 academic year.

Cha Gheill!