



LOCAL FOOD TOOL KIT

A resource of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA), in partnership with the University of Guelph (OAC) and the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance.

SUMMARY

Ontario's agri-food sector plays a critical role in supporting economic development, food security, environmental sustainability, and communities. Increasing consumer interest in local food, concerns about supply chain resilience, and growing recognition of the economic value of regional food systems have created new opportunities to strengthen local food production, procurement, processing, and promotion across the province. Provincial initiatives including the Local Food Act, 2013, the Grow Ontario Strategy, and the Buy Ontario Act, 2025 provide a strong policy framework to support these efforts.

The Local Food Toolkit has been developed as an online resource to help municipalities, public institutions, businesses, community organizations, educators, and consumers learn about and actively support Ontario's local food system. The toolkit combines policy information, implementation guidance, supplier connections, opportunities, event planning resources, and links to organizations across Ontario's agri-food sector.

The toolkit is organized around five key pillars:

Learn. Connect. Act. Innovate. Celebrate.

Section 1:

Understanding Ontario's Local Food Policy Framework

Local Food Act, 2013

The Local Food Act, 2013 was created to increase awareness of the local food system in Ontario by expanding access to Ontario grown and produced food, and creating relationships with producers, processors, distributors, institutions, and consumers. The legislation recognizes the important role that local food plays in supporting the provincial economy, improving food literacy, and creating resilient communities.

Supporting local producers helps keep food dollars circulating within communities and also creates opportunities for Ontario farmers and food businesses. By supporting local food production and consumption, communities are better positioned to withstand disruptions in global supply chains and respond to changing economic conditions.

Organizations can take action with a high impact by supporting Ontario's local food system. Start by choosing Ontario grown and Ontario made products whenever possible and setting clear procurement goals to track progress. Promote Local Food Week to build awareness, and help build relationships with local producers, and support initiatives that help people understand the value of choosing local food options.

See Infographic Local Food Act, 2013:  [The Local Food Act.jpg](#)

Grow Ontario Strategy

The Grow Ontario Strategy is the Province's long term plan to expand Ontario's agri-food sector. It was developed in response to changing market conditions and lessons learned from global disruptions, the strategy focuses on creating a competitive, innovative, and resilient food system capable of supporting future growth.

Ontario's Grow Ontario Strategy is built around priorities that work together to build resilience in the province's agri-food sector. These priorities focus on growing agri-food supply chains, increasing innovation and competitiveness, and enhancing labour and workforce development to address ongoing skills shortages. They also aim to expand market access for Ontario products, strengthen resilience and sustainability across the food system, and improve regulatory efficiency to reduce barriers for businesses. These priorities support a more competitive, future ready, and resilient agri-food sector.

Municipalities, institutions, and businesses can support the strategy by investing in local food infrastructure, supporting food processing and manufacturing, encouraging workforce development, and strengthening regional supply chains.

See Infographic Grow Ontario Strategy:  Grow Ontario Strategy.jpg

Buy Ontario Act, 2025

The Buy Ontario Act encourages organizations, institutions, businesses, and consumers to prioritize Ontario made and Ontario grown products whenever possible. The legislation recognizes that buying local food contributes to economic development, food security, and stronger regional supply chains.

Buying Ontario made and grown products has direct benefits to communities by supporting local jobs and businesses, keeping spending within the province, and strengthening food system resilience. Choosing to buy locally also creates opportunities for farmers and processors and reduces dependence on distant and vulnerable supply chains. Public institutions play a particularly important role, such as schools, hospitals, long term care homes, municipal facilities, and government agencies can significantly influence demand by integrating local food into their procurement policies. The Serving Up Local initiative shows how institutions can work together to increase local purchasing and build a stronger supply chain across Ontario.

See Infographic Buy Ontario Act, 2025:  Buy Ontario Act.jpg

Section 2:

Increasing Local Food Procurement

Local food procurement is one of the most effective ways organizations can support Ontario agriculture, local economies and food systems. Procurement initiatives can range from purchasing seasonal products to implementing formal organizational policies that prioritize Ontario grown and Ontario made food.

Five Steps to Local Food Procurement

Step 1: Assess Current Purchasing

Review existing purchasing practices and identify current local food purchases.

Step 2: Set Local Food Goals

Establish realistic procurement targets and measurable objectives.

Step 3: Identify Suppliers

Build relationships with local farmers, processors, distributors, and food organizations.

Step 4: Integrate Procurement Practices

Review purchasing policies, contracts, and procurement processes.

Step 5: Measure and Report

Track progress and communicate successes.

See Infographic Steps to Increasing Local Food Procurement:

 [Five Steps to Increase Local Food Procurement](#)

Section 3:

Value Added Agriculture and Food Processing

Value added agriculture involves transforming raw agricultural commodities into products with increased economic value, improved marketability, longer shelf life, or enhanced consumer appeal. It can help producers diversify income, reduce waste, and create stronger connections with consumers.

Examples of value added products are jams and preserves, cheese, cider and fruit beverages, specialty foods, and baked goods to name a few. This creates new revenue opportunities, diversified farm income, and reduced food waste ultimately Increased local economic activity.

Ontario producers and entrepreneurs can access support through: University of Guelph Food Innovation Centre, Conestoga Food Research and Innovation Lab, Niagara College Food and Beverage Innovation Centre, Food and Beverage Ontario, and Canadian Food Innovation Network.

See Value Added Processing on the Farm Questions and Answers :

 [Value Added Agriculture and Food Processing](#)

Section 4:

Celebrating Local Food

Local food celebrations provide opportunities to showcase Ontario farmers, food businesses, organizations, and communities. These events increase awareness, encourage local purchasing, strengthen connections within the food system, and contribute to community development. Successful events are built on a building a planning framework that answers six key questions: why the event is being held, who should be involved, what activities will be offered, when the timing best aligns with seasonal opportunities, where the event will take place, and how logistics, marketing, permits, and operations will be managed. Event ideas range from Local Food Week celebrations and agricultural awareness days to food festivals, farmers market partnerships, school programs, Taste of Ontario lunches, and harvest themed gatherings.

See Infographic on Celebrating Local Food:  [Local Food Celebrations](#)

Section 5:

Education, Research and Innovation

Ontario's colleges, universities, research institutions, and innovation organizations play an important role in supporting sector growth, workforce development, food innovation, and knowledge transfer. The University of Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College leads nationally in agricultural education, with expertise spanning food, environment, and rural communities. Fleming College contributes through programs in environmental and natural resource management, while Trent University offers strong Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems programming. Conestoga College supports industry needs through food processing, agri-business, and food innovation services. These institutions are complemented by key innovation organizations, including Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario (ARIO), the Canadian Food Innovation Network, the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance, and the Livestock Research Innovation Corporation, which collectively drive research, commercialization, and sector innovation across Ontario.

Find directory under section 6 for contact information on these organizations.

Section 6:

Connecting with Ontario's Food System

Ontario has a diverse and interconnected agri-food network that includes producer organizations, commodity groups, industry associations, educational institutions, marketing organizations, innovation centres, and government agencies. The directory within this toolkit serves as a gateway to these resources and partnerships.

Explore the Ontario Agri-Food Directory: [Ontario Agri-Food Directory](#)

Conclusion

Ontario's local food system is strengthened when communities, organizations, businesses and consumers, work together to support the people who grow our food across the province. The Local Food Toolkit provides information to help support and strengthen our food system. Choosing Ontario products, strengthening procurement practices, supporting local businesses, celebrating local food, and connecting with research and innovation this The Local Food Toolkit is a great resource to use. Every action can help build a stronger, more resilient, and connected Ontario food system. Explore the toolkit, find the resources that fit your organization or community, and take the next step toward supporting local food in Ontario.



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