

June 25, 2020

To: Mayor Jones and Members of the Council of the Township of Douro-Dummer

For local food system advocates, crisis is constant - from unacceptable rates of food insecurity and diet-related health epidemics, to farmland loss and the increasing cost-price squeeze that is eradicating farm businesses at an unprecedented rate. COVID-19 is exacerbating these existing crises while exposing the fault lines of our current food system. Our communities are facing overwhelming uncertainty and we are responding with an urgent call to action to meet the immediate-term crises, while strategizing to forge a more resilient food future beyond the disruption of the current pandemic.

For the last eight years, the Future of Food & Farming Working Group (FFFWG) has worked towards the goal of feeding ourselves sustainably with local, healthy foods, as outlined in the Agriculture and Local Food section of Sustainable Peterborough's Community Plan of 2012. The three strategies identified in the plan were: protecting adequate farmland; encouraging environmental stewardship and facilitating the production, storage, processing, distribution; and marketing of local, healthy food. More recently, the 2017 Climate Change Action Plan also referenced the need to strengthen the local food system (see Appendix A). The FFFWG is now entering a new phase, independent of Sustainable Peterborough, and its members are continuing their work as it becomes more urgent in the face of climate change, food security concerns, and the current pandemic.

In the last several weeks, COVID-19 has made clear how essential a resilient and coordinated local food system is at all times, but particularly in times of crisis. We have seen marked increases in the need for emergency food, demand for food from local producers, and interest in home and community food gardening (please refer to recent media provided in Appendix B). This emergency has elevated the importance of local work that has been underway for decades, developing and promoting a sustainable food system in the Peterborough region. An impressive mobilization effort has taken place over the last few weeks and we feel it is important to acknowledge and garner support for these activities, as much of this work is taking place on a volunteer basis with little to no financial resources.

The following is a summary of some of the work that FFFWG members have undertaken in response to the pandemic:

Nourish has worked with Sustain Ontario and the Ontario Community Garden Network to successfully advocate for community gardens to be deemed an essential service. The Peterborough region has the highest per capita number of community gardens in the country, and they provide a significant amount of food. Peterborough Public Health has developed protocols to allow community gardens to operate safely. Demand for vegetable seeds has spiked in recent weeks, indicating that home and community gardening is going to be of particular importance this year, both as a food source, and a promoter of mental health. Furthermore, through bi-weekly Emergency Just Food Boxes and other initiatives, Nourish has been continuing to address food insecurity in Peterborough.

The **Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN)** is hosting regular community conversations on food and vulnerable populations during COVID-19. These conversations help support and connect groups working on or interested in food access for vulnerable populations during the pandemic. The following three sub-groups have been formed to address specific issues:

1. Securing food for people in need who are isolated
2. Securing prepared food for people who are precariously housed
3. Advocacy to address the roots of food insecurity and poverty (during and beyond COVID-19)

Farms at Work has been reaching out directly to the farm community and local farmers' markets to promote innovative ways of direct marketing to consumers, given the new realities around social distancing and farmers' markets. They have been keeping farms up to date on new financial and business supports as they are announced. A new local website has been launched to help keep farmers connected to each other. Farms at Work also surveyed farms this spring and determined there is a need for a public online

directory of local farms who are directly marketing to Peterborough. This website is now funded and under development, connected to the Local Food Peterborough initiative.

In response to the pandemic, **Peterborough Child and Family Centres**, the lead agency for Student Nutrition Ontario Central East, have pivoted funds from procurement of food for school programs to providing more financial and food support to local food banks and school families in need. There has also been more emphasis on local procurement in the face of the crisis, and an exploration of how to create stronger relationships with local growers.

Trent University has granted permission for students to continue growing food at the campus farm and garden in order to contribute to community food initiatives and to ensure that its Seasoned Spoon café will have enough produce to continue operating in the fall. The University is also exploring research opportunities to answer COVID-19 related questions with respect to emergency food provision. This research could help us understand how much food production is required to feed our community in times of crisis.

The FFFWG, led by Farms at Work, launched the new Local Food Peterborough website (www.localfoodptbo.ca) providing consumers with a gateway to information on finding food, growing food, and all of the work of the FFFWG members throughout the community. Local Food Peterborough social media (@localfoodptbo) has been used to post real-time information about the availability of food from farms, stores, and restaurants, as these businesses struggle to respond to the recent restrictions.

We are pleased to note that **Peterborough and the Kawarthas Economic Development** has included in the recently-approved COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan, a commitment to support Buy Local campaigns across the region.

With this letter, we hope to secure your committed support for the work being done and a more central role for local food in your mandates, budgets, and policy conversations. Our Working Group represents a large network of community groups and individuals with the experience, expertise, and innovative problem-solving capacity that are essential to weathering exactly the kind of storm we are living through today. Further, over the past eight years, our Working Group has completed [extensive research and consultation](#) documenting the important role that food and agriculture play in a strong and vibrant economy. On March 2nd we held our fifth Food and Farm Summit where we heard community members' needs and ideas around food and farming, and documented the need to promote and protect a strong and resilient food system.

As we transition into a post-COVID reality, we ask:

- How can we ensure that local food system goals and strategies laid out in existing Community Plans are consistently recognized in local policy and regulatory decision-making, as well as budget development?
- How can local governments play a more participatory role in local food work?

As a first step, we request a meeting with the Mayor and Warden to explore the above questions. We are committed to working with you and look forward to hearing from you as to how we can move forward together.

Sincerely,

Dawn Berry Merriam and Pat Learmonth,
Co-Chairs, Peterborough Future of Food and Farming Working Group

Appendix A: Excerpts from Sustainable Peterborough Climate Change Action Plan, 2017

Excerpts from Sustainable Peterborough Climate Change Action Plan, 2017

Relating to Food and Agriculture

Our Land

Where are we now?

How we use our land affects our GHG emissions and thus climate change. In turn, climate change affects our land. Through its Climate Change Action Plan and planning policy direction, the province is looking to municipalities to strengthen land use policies to better mitigate and adapt to climate change. In the GPA, an assessment of climate change risks and impacts will better help prepare for impending changes, and protecting and enhancing our natural assets in the present will help buffer against such future changes.

How are we planning to act?

Our Land	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen land use policy and the development review process to better support climate change mitigation and adaptation Identify climate change risks and prepare for potential impacts Protect and enhance natural assets Facilitate best management practices for low emission farming and climate change adaptation

Strategy L4: Facilitate best management practices for low emission farming and climate change adaptation	
Overview	Low emission farming and climate adaptation planning for farms is an evolving area of focus in the agricultural field. As these practices evolve, their uptake will become commonplace.
Recommended Approach	<p>To support farmers implement best management practices, the following is recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote usage of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's no-cost Holos GHG emissions modeling tool to assist farmers in assessing their GHG emissions and exploring various farm management scenarios Support local agricultural organizations to host local agricultural forums and training sessions to engage with farmers on how to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation related best management practices Support local agricultural organizations to promote local participation in the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Program to encourage farmers to increase knowledge, conduct assessments, and develop and implement Environmental Farm Plans for their farms
Timing	Ongoing
Implementers	County and townships in association with local agricultural organizations

Our Food

Where are we now?

The choices we make, such as the food we eat, all have a role to play in how we impact the climate. For example, purchasing locally produced food reduces the amount of energy needed to ship it, and thus reducing GHG emissions. Additionally, wasting less food results in less organic matter being sent to landfill and less GHG emissions resulting from decomposition.

How are we planning to act?

Our Food	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support localization of the food system• Encourage purchasing of locally produced food• Reduce the amount of wasted food

Strategy F1: Support localization of the food system	
Primary Action	Undertake a community food system assessment to better understand local food production and movement within the GPA.
Overview	A clear understanding of the agriculture and food production system in the GPA is not fully known. A more in-depth exploration of the current food production and processing capacity of the GPA can provide a better understanding of this and explore opportunities to improve the local food production and processing capacity of the GPA.
Recommended Approach	Engaging with the local agricultural and food organizations to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify agricultural production and local food processing in the GPA;• Document movement of food out of and into the GPA;• Explore barriers and opportunities to further processing of food locally; and• Explore sale of locally produced/processed food and barriers and opportunities to increasing local sales.
Timing	2018-19
Implementers	Collaboration between City of Peterborough and Peterborough County, including local partners

Strategy F2: Encourage purchasing of locally produced food

Overview	Many mechanisms and efforts are already underway to encourage the purchase of local food across the GPA. Making local food a priority and encouraging and supporting further local food purchasing can be undertaken by all communities and through support of the existing initiatives and organizations.
Recommended Approach	The following is the recommended approaches to encourage the purchase of local food: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support local organizations to promote the marketing of locally-produced food through initiatives such as the Purple Onion Festival and Local Food Month;• Expand and promote the Farmers Market Network across the Greater Peterborough Area; and• Support and encourage farm gate sale of produce.

Strategy F2: Encourage purchasing of locally produced food

Timing	Ongoing
Implementers	All local communities.

Strategy F3: Reduce the amount of wasted food

Primary Action	Implement a residential awareness campaign to encourage elimination of wasted food in the home, workplaces, and schools.
Overview	Food waste from residents, businesses, and institutions is one of the major contributors to organic material being disposed of in landfill and contributing to GHG emissions. A significant proportion of food waste generated can be avoided through changes to food purchasing and preparation techniques and planning, and general awareness.
Recommended Approach	It is recommended that an awareness campaign be implemented to educate people about the amount of food that is being wasted, what it costs, and how much GHG emissions it results in. The campaign should aim to educate on ways to reduce excess food waste from the planning to eating phases, as well as alternatives to disposal of leftover food. Campaigns should be targeted and tailored to the various generators of food waste across the GPA (e.g. City residents, County residents, local businesses, schools and other institutions) with an ultimate goal of educating people and creating a culture of conservation.
Timing	County campaign in 2016; City in 2018/19
Implementers	County of Peterborough and City of Peterborough

Appendix B: Media Articles Highlighting the Importance of Local Food and Farming during COVID-19

[**The Peterborough Examiner:** Farms at Work directs shoppers to local food in Peterborough County](#)

[**The Peterborough Examiner:** Farms at Work launches local food portal](#)

[**Electric City Magazine:** ‘Grow Food Peterborough’ to serve as new hub for local food](#)

[**The National Observer:** Farmers enjoy new popularity as COVID-19 leads to fears about food instability](#)

[**CBC News:** Seed sellers see business bloom as pandemic pushes demand](#)

[**The National Observer:** Small farms tackle COVID-19 and Canada’s food system](#)

[**CBC News:** Local farmers seeing boom in business as pandemic drives up demand](#)

[**Global News:** Canada’s meat-and-potato problem: Coronavirus pandemic hits the food supply chain](#)

[**Toronto Life Magazine:** “Now more than ever, we are seeing people engage with local food”: How Ontario farmers are faring during the pandemic](#)