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*Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001*

August 3, 2016

The Honorable Jeff Leal
Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
77 Grenville Street, 11th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1B3

Re: Input on OMAFRA's Draft Local Food Access Goals

Dear Minister Leal,

I would like to thank you for including the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) in your ministry's April consultations on proposed local food access goals as well as provide some additional feedback. We are excited about the prospects for Ontarians to have greater access to local food and have outlined below some recommendations to help achieve this goal.

Proposed Revisions to OMAFRA's Draft Goals

OPHA advocates for Ontario ministries to assess the health impact of their measures to ensure governmental policies and programs support the health and wellbeing of those in our province. Therefore, we urge you to emphasize foods that are both healthy and local as part of your ministry's goals.

We have taken the liberty of demonstrating how this could be achieved through the words added in italics below:

1. Increase opportunities for all Ontarians to choose local, healthy food.
2. Increase the variety of local, healthy food offerings to celebrate the diversity of Ontario and its foods.
3. Increase collaborations and strengthen partnerships among producers, communities, and the public and private sectors to increase access to local, healthy food.

We believe it is beneficial to have a variety of local foods that support the Ontario economy; however, local food does not always mean healthy food. Given that local food is defined as food harvested or produced in Ontario, local food can be processed in a manner that compromises its nutritional value. Hence, our recommendation that the words "healthy" be added to these three goals.

In addition, community members and many of OPHA's constituents have expressed concern over the promotion of local wines and beers as part of local food initiatives. We acknowledge that alcoholic beverages can be enjoyed in moderation, but we urge OMAFRA to be mindful of the potential harms and costs of promoting increased access.

OPHA recommends that the third goal include the term “access” to healthy local food so that emphasis is put on ensuring all Ontarians, particularly those of lower socioeconomic status and in remote regions can access local healthy food. Financial and geographical barriers can prevent Ontarians from accessing food, let alone local food. OPHA urges that the draft goals prioritize local foods being financially and geographically accessible.

Initiatives in Support of Local Food Access

OPHA is proud to host the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) which works to strengthen the capacity of health promotion professionals and community partners involved with healthy eating and nutrition across the health continuum. In promoting healthy eating, the NRC works in support of food literacy and food access skills and knowledge. With its extensive partnerships, nutritional expertise and service offerings, there are a range of ways that the NRC can support the achievement of the ministry’s goals. Be it through bringing different sectors together to develop collaborative strategies, creating resources and tools that support local food producers to incorporate healthy eating messaging, the NRC can help create a culture that values healthy, local foods.

OPHA was pleased to have received support in the past from your ministry to manage the Community Food Advisor (CFA) program. As a food literacy project, the CFA strengthens Ontarians capacity in food selection and preparation, purchasing of locally grown foods, and the ability to make healthier food choices. The CFA program has the potential to broaden its reach and impact and further OMAFRA’s food access goals.

Measuring Success of Local Food Access Goals

The Nutrition Resource Centre has been working with a range of experts to develop effective indicators and outcome measures related to healthy eating and would be pleased to share their work with your ministry.

In measuring success, it is important to recognize the diversity of Ontario’s population and its food preferences and promote the use of local ingredients in different ethnic and cultural and Indigenous cuisines. Ultimately, the success of local food access goals will be their acceptance in all communities and increased understanding, consumption and support for the value and benefits of healthy, local food.

Thanks again for providing us with an opportunity to provide feedback. We will be following up with your ministry to discuss potential partnership opportunities to advance OMAFRA’s local food access goals.

Thank you for your consideration,



Ellen Wodchis
President