

44 Victoria Street  
Suite 502  
Toronto, ON M5C 1Y2

Tel: (416) 367-3313  
Fax: (416) 367-2844  
E-mail: [admin@opha.on.ca](mailto:admin@opha.on.ca)  
[www.opha.on.ca](http://www.opha.on.ca)

#### President

Larry Stinson  
E-mail: [Lstinson@opha.on.ca](mailto:Lstinson@opha.on.ca)

#### Executive Director

Pegeen Walsh  
E-mail: [pwalsh@opha.on.ca](mailto:pwalsh@opha.on.ca)

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January 16, 2015

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

Dear Minister Leal,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and your staff at the Food Literacy Consultation this past November. I am writing to provide additional input to the development of the targets around food literacy related to local foods and to outline how the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) can help OMAFRA support these goals.

OPHA is committed to promoting a health in all policies approach and as such we urge you to consider emphasizing both healthy and local foods in your food literacy goals. We have taken the liberty of demonstrating how this could be achieved through the words added in italics below:

Goal 1 - Increase the number of Ontarians who are aware of local *and healthy* foods.

Goal 2 - Increase the number of Ontarians who know where to *access* local *and healthy* foods (*i.e. not just "buy" local foods so that the issue of food access can be considered*).

Goal 3: Increase the number of Ontarians and food service providers who know how to prepare meals for family, friends and consumers using local *and healthy* foods.

OPHA has a track record of supporting initiatives that increase access and preference for healthy and local food through its coordination of the Community Food Advisor (CFA) Program and our Nutrition Resource Centre's work on food literacy and food skill development.

OPHA has been partnering with OMAFRA and coordinating the Community Food Advisor (CFA) Program since 2001. The program was initiated in 1991 by OMAFRA to teach food skills to a wide range of community groups and continues to offer a unique opportunity to support the Local Food Act. Allow me to describe the scope, reach and impact of this program and how it can help you achieve your food literacy goals.

The Community Food Advisor Program objectives align with OMAFRA's overall goals to support food literacy related to local food:

1. Build and strengthen the food skills and food literacy of Ontarians, including food selection (e.g. shopping, budgeting), food preparation, safe food handling, food storage and preservation, and sourcing and purchasing locally grown foods;
2. Assist Ontarians with making healthier food choices and eating behaviours;
3. Benefit farmers and stimulate the local economy through the promotion of Ontario foods;
4. Increase the ease of sourcing and buying locally for Ontarians

Community Food Advisors work with a variety of people and groups and in a wide range of settings addressing the needs of each particular community (e.g. children, adolescents, adults and seniors in community centers, collective kitchens, food box programs, schools, workplaces, group homes, mental health programs, farmers' markets). In 2013, there were over 247 Community Food Advisors in 14 areas of Ontario who reached 21,785 Ontarians in rural and urban areas. The program volunteers provided 773 health promotion services on a variety of food and nutrition topics to Ontarians across the province and provided over 5,000 volunteer hours. These volunteers are essential to the success of the program as they increase awareness and skills around local and healthy foods in their own communities and extend the program's reach and impact.

The Community Food Advisor Program is the only provincially coordinated food skills program in Ontario. A coordinated provincial approach to food skills means more leveraging and less duplication of resources and development of updated and reliable training materials and resources that are shared across the province in both rural and urban communities.

Thanks again for providing us with an opportunity to provide feedback on your goals and for your past support and partnership with the Community Food Advisor Program. We will be following up with your office to discuss the potential for our continued partnership to advance OMAFRA's food literacy goals.

Sincerely,



Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director  
Ontario Public Health Association

CC: Karl Maiterth, Sherry Persaud, Jaya James, Jeff O'Donnell, Denise Zaborowski (OMAFRA)