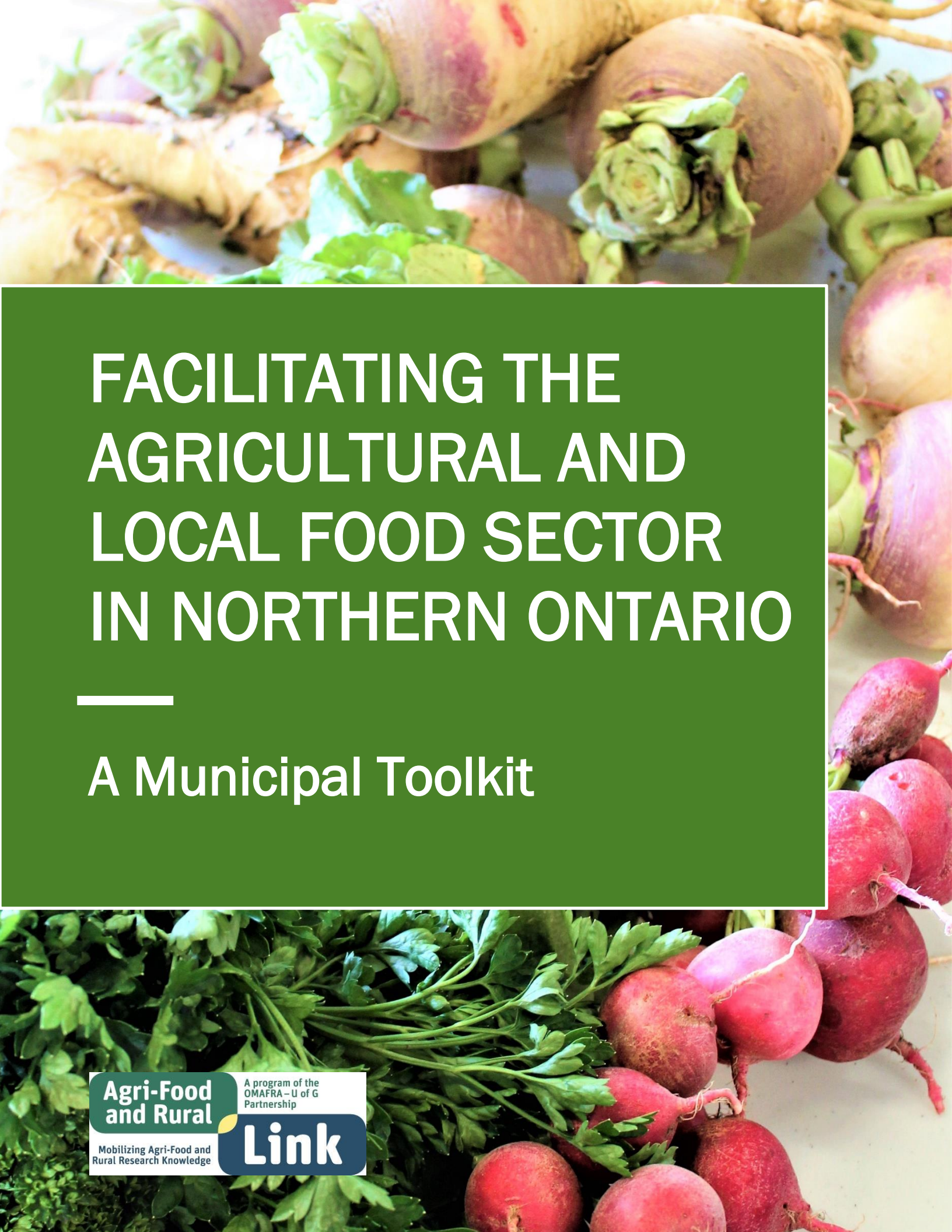




FACILITATING THE AGRICULTURAL AND LOCAL FOOD SECTOR IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

A Municipal Toolkit

**Agri-Food
and Rural**

A program of the
OMAFRA – U of G
Partnership

Mobilizing Agri-Food and
Rural Research Knowledge

Link

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The information for this toolkit was collected through in-person and telephone interviews as well as reviewing additional information available online.

The views expressed in this publication are the views of the contributing authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs.

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Section One: Local Food and Healthy Northern Ontario Communities

Healthful local food is not equally available across Ontario. Many Northern communities have a significantly limited supply of local food and many locales can be considered food deserts. Food security is a priority for Northern Ontario residents as they often pay higher prices for food due to transportation costs. Issues of health and wellbeing subsequently arise and can be directly linked to the consumption of food. As food sovereignty/security are intrinsically linked to local food systems, it is important to understand what food is available locally and what potential currently exists to increase access to local food in Northern Ontario. Furthermore, understanding current food production and distribution systems in Northern Ontario is fundamental in addressing the issue of local food access facing Northern residents and how access to local food can be improved.



1.1 Why did we create this toolkit?

To address issues of food sovereignty/security in Northern Ontario, it is essential to understand the circumstances that limit local food access. To do so, one must identify and evaluate the challenges that producers and processors encounter in getting their products through the value chain to the end consumer. This toolkit was compiled with the intent to assist Northern Ontario municipalities on how to encourage and enhance agriculture and access to local food and ultimately, promote healthier Northern residents.

1.2 Who should use this toolkit?

This toolkit is intended for communities in Northern Ontario and is user friendly for community leaders, municipal staff and members of the public. It is recognized that there are many actions that can be taken to improve access to local food in Northern Ontario; however, this toolkit identifies 10 actions that Northern Ontario municipalities can implement to support and grow Northern food production. It is recommended that users of this toolkit also familiarize themselves with provincial agriculture and food legislation, as well as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's Agri-Food Initiatives Ontario Directory.

1.3 What are we trying to achieve?

Some rural agricultural communities have limited agricultural opportunities and unstable economic bases. In identifying opportunities and best practices for the expansion of agriculture, including attracting new farmers, access to local food can be improved and new sources of economic growth can be attained.

Based on our experiences, many municipalities across the north are working to identify the means and tools by which they can re-establish and expand the Northern agricultural sector. Through a collaborative network approach, this toolkit identifies resources and best practices to assist in this development.



This toolkit highlights some of the challenges and opportunities for the establishment and growth of local food and agriculture in the north through the examination of the 2016 Census of Agriculture data on Northern Ontario as well as through interviews with several key Northern Ontario local food stakeholders. Existing policies, organizations and initiatives to support the growth of Northern Ontario's local food sector are also profiled. The district case studies feature the innovative ways in which some Northern Ontario local food producers have stayed competitive and provides some examples where collaboration and networking have strengthened local food initiatives. The various sections of the toolkit converge to suggest best practices to further the sector in Northern Ontario.

DID YOU KNOW?



In 2016, Northern Ontario had over
72,000
hens & chickens!



Section Two: Local Food Production in the North

Northern Ontario agriculture, aquaculture and food processing is often eclipsed by Southern Ontario's agri-food sector; however, it has well established beef, dairy, grain and oilseed, potato, fruit and vegetable, and rainbow trout industries. In fact, beef production in Northern Ontario is equivalent in size to that of New Brunswick, is home to the biggest maple syrup producer in Ontario and produces more rainbow trout than the rest of Canada combined.¹ With new technologies and a warming climate, crop yields are improving and the range of crops that can be grown in Northern Ontario is also increasing. Northern Ontario's agri-food sector contributes heavily to the economic health of many Northern communities, for example, food and beverage processors alone employ over 1,000 Northerners.² The following infographic summarizes the 2016 Census of Agriculture Farm and Food Operator Data release for Northern Ontario from Statistics Canada.³



8% Growth
in small farms
(reporting under 10
acres in size from
2011-2016)

There are **2,237**
farms in Northern
Ontario equaling

883,559 acres
of farmland!

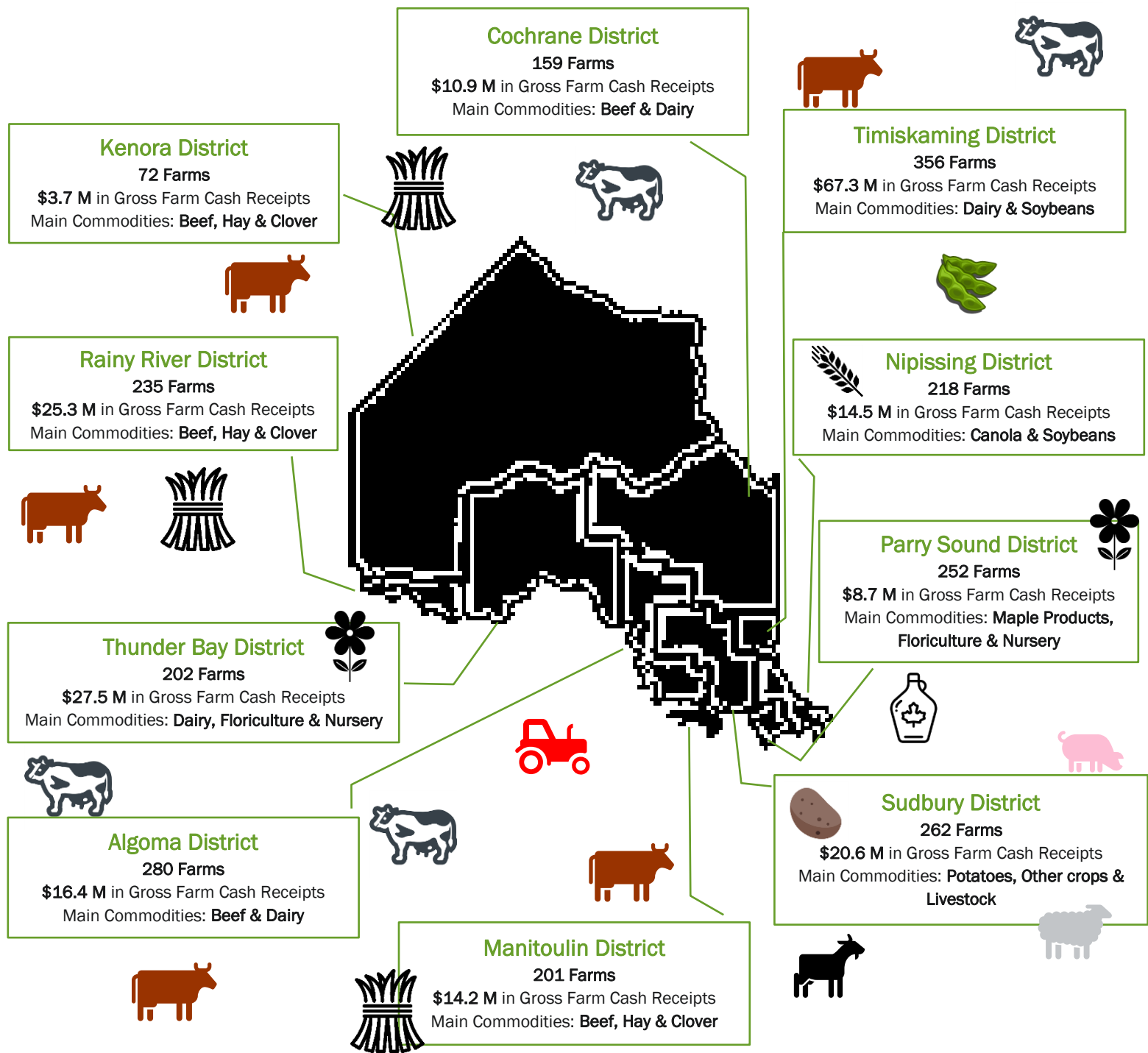
In 2016, Northern Ontario
farms generated
\$209 MILLION
in gross farm cash receipts,
up 9%
since the 2011 census.



The average age of a
farm operator in
Northern Ontario is

55

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture 2006 – 2016; OMAFRA, 2017.



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture 2006 – 2016; OMAFRA, 2017.

Section Three: Supporting Local Food & Agriculture in your Municipality

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Action One | Develop an Agricultural Advisory Committee |
| Action Two | Create an Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy |
| Action Three | Map your Agricultural Assets |
| Action Four | Create Policies that are Supportive of Agriculture and Agricultural-Related Activities |
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| Action Eight | Build Partnerships with Other Municipalities |
| Action Nine | Invest in Local Infrastructure |
| Action Ten | Get to Know your Farm Organizations |



3.1 10 Actions to Support Local Food in you Municipality



In 2013, The Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) created a local food guide for municipalities⁴ and in 2018, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) released the *Agri-Food Initiatives Ontario Directory* (AFIO)⁵. Both of which are excellent resources that complement the information and action items recommended in this toolkit.

Through extensive research conducted for this toolkit, the following 10 action items have been compiled to guide municipalities to facilitate and grow their local food economies by supporting and promoting local food and agricultural initiatives in their jurisdictions.

Action One: Develop an Agricultural Advisory Committee

Why is developing an agricultural advisory committee important?

The importance of developing an Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) has been recognized by numerous municipalities across Ontario and Canada. In the past, agricultural interests would have been represented by farmers acting as municipal councilors. With declining farm populations, agricultural interests are not as well represented within municipal governments. Municipal decisions can impact farm businesses and without input from this community, the impacts on agriculture and local food can be overlooked.

The purpose of an AAC is to promote and support local food and agricultural interests in their local municipality. An AAC provides an agricultural perspective when giving recommendations to municipal staff and council regarding various matters. Issues in which an AAC may advise vary, but often include land use policy, economic development, transportation and infrastructure developments. The composition of an effective AAC includes members representing the diverse farming interests of the community. Municipalities that have developed an AAC have empowered their agricultural community and have reduced land use conflicts as all stakeholders have been involved in decision making.





Example- West Nipissing Agricultural Advisory Committee

The corporation of the Municipality of West Nipissing created their own agricultural advisory committee (AAC) in 1999, which is an official advisory committee to Council. The West Nipissing AAC advises Council on matters affecting local agriculture, which includes participating in the development of Official Plan policies and Zoning By-laws and advising council on West Nipissing's agricultural vision. The committee currently has eight members, consisting of municipal staff, an OMAFRA representative, and five members from the local farming community. The AAC meets on an ad hoc basis and meetings are open to the public. The committee is supported by a West Nipissing Municipal staff member who provides administrative, procedural and technical assistance. As West Nipissing's AAC is an official advisory committee to Council, the Municipal Council provides an operating budget.⁶

Action Two: Create a Food Charter and an Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy

Why is creating a food charter and an agriculture and agri-food sector strategy important?

Many municipalities across Ontario are developing a local food charter and an agriculture and agri-food sector strategy. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit defines a food charter as *"a value, vision, or principle statement and/or a series of goals developed by a city, town or region that has a broad base of support and describes what a community wants their food system to look like. It is a reference document for municipal decision makers"*.⁷ Food charters are the result of a collaborative effort among diverse stakeholders, including those involved in agriculture, local food, economic development, health and community services. Food charters are the base for food-related policy development. The creation of a food charter is an important step for municipalities to collaborate with different interest groups and coordinate efforts to address the challenges facing their food system.



The Greater Sudbury Food Policy Council defines a food strategy as *"a document that identifies short- and long-term actions to help enhance our current regional food system and prepare for growth and change in the future. Key elements include social justice, environmental sustainability, healthy eating and economic and community growth."*⁸

An agriculture and agri-food sector strategy help a municipality or region to assess their current agricultural/ food system, conduct a value chain analysis, and consult with various local food stakeholders to create a strategic plan to support the growth of agriculture and local food within their jurisdiction.

Example- Thunder Bay Food Charter / Thunder Bay + Area Food Strategy



The Thunder Bay Food Charter was adopted by the Thunder Bay City Council in 2008, as well as 33 other local municipalities, organizations and businesses. The charter was created through a multi-stakeholder, community-led initiative. The charter identifies five principles “to govern decisions regarding food production, distribution, access, consumption and waste management.” These principles are:

1. **Build community economic development**
2. **Celebrate culture and collaboration**
3. **Ensure social justice**
4. **Preserve environmental integrity**
5. **Foster population health.**

The charter outlines the vision and principles for which the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy is based.⁹

The Thunder Bay Food Strategy was developed through several consultations with various stakeholder groups. The strategy received abundant feedback, having received input from over 400 people. The strategy is organized into seven pillars/ action areas. These pillars are:

1. Food access
2. Forest and freshwater foods
3. Food infrastructure
4. Food procurement
5. Food production
6. School food environments
7. Urban agriculture



The Thunder Bay Food Strategy serves the region by creating a more coordinated approach to improving the food system and serves as a solid foundation on which an implementation plan is being built.



Action Three: Map your Agricultural Assets

Why is mapping your agricultural assets important?

Asset mapping has proven to be an essential tool for supporting the agricultural viability of a region. In 2017, the province of Ontario updated the provincial land use plans for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), creating an agricultural land base map as well as an inventory of agriculture and local food related services in an agricultural systems portal. By creating these resources, the Province and the municipalities within the GGH can better understand how to protect farmland and support the viability of the agri-food sector.

Similarly, in 2017, to understand the challenges faced by Northern Ontario with regards to locally produced food, the researchers for this project inventoried the existing production and distribution services available to farmers in Northern Ontario. Through a collaborative effort with several Northern Ontario organizations, a directory of services, including production level services (veterinarians, crop advisors), value added services (dairies, creameries), and distribution and retail services, has been compiled. This directory also helps to identify where gaps in services exist. This [asset map](#), pictured above, can be accessed through the [project website](#).

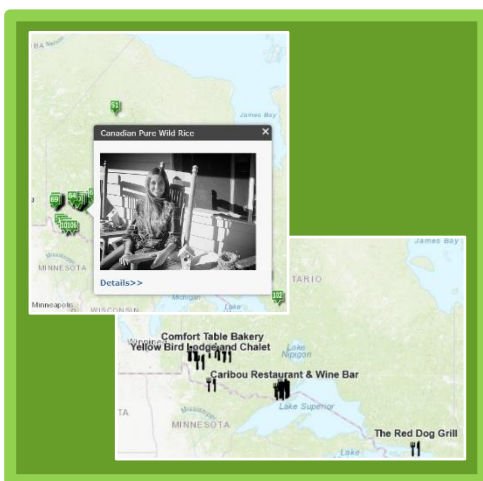
Farm Services in Northern Ontario



Example- Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op- Regional Food Mapping Project

In 2014, the Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op Inc. ("Cloverbelt") received \$50,000 in federal funding to develop an online local food mapping and distribution network.¹⁰ This database of maps can be accessed at <https://arcg.is/1Gr9e0>. Cloverbelt has created several maps including mapping northwestern Ontario producers which also includes a list of the products they offer and a producer biography; a map of all products available by produce type; a map of all farm operations by system type (producer, processor, distributor); and a map of all restaurants using local supplies. By

mapping northwestern Ontario's food system, the maps act as both a promotional tool for producers and businesses, while also identifying where local food capacity can be built in the region.



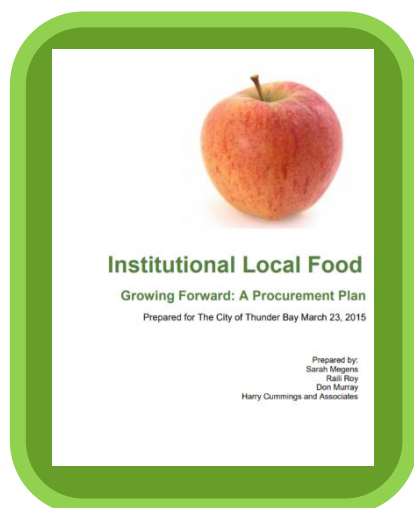
Action Four: Create Policies that are Supportive of Agriculture and Agricultural-Related Activities

Why is creating supportive agricultural policies important?

To support and grow agriculture and local food in Northern Ontario it is imperative to have policies in place to support agriculture and agricultural-related activities. It is advised that clear definitions of on-farm diversification, value-added agriculture and agri-tourism be outlined in municipal policies. Zoning by-laws and Official Plans should also have clearly identified permitted uses on agricultural lands. A key resource for municipalities is the Province's recent *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Lands*.¹¹ To support the growth of local food, consulting with producers on direct farm marketing policy development and creating local food procurement policies would further support farmers and farm businesses.



Example- The City of Thunder Bay's Supply Management by-law



The City of Thunder Bay is a shining example of a municipality dedicated to local food procurement. Within the City of Thunder Bay's Supply Management by-law article 2.03 Sustainable Environmental and Ethical Procurement states that suppliers are "expected to strive continually towards minimizing the environmental impacts of their operations and the Goods and Services provided".¹² While this by-law does not mention local food directly, it uses flexible language that allows for local food procurement. The by-law governs food procurement of multiple municipal facilities including long-term care and child care facilities. The holistic nature of this policy considers the social and environmental considerations related to food procurement thereby creating conditions for a more resilient food system.¹³

In 2016, the City of Thunder Bay's Supply Management Division reported that the City increased its total spending on local (Ontario) and regional foods to 38.45%, up 11% since 2015.¹⁴ This success has been attributed to City Council's commitment to building relationships with regional growers and distributors and investing in agricultural education and training.

Action Five: Build Agricultural Knowledge of Municipal Staff

Why is building the agricultural knowledge of municipal staff important?



As the number of farms in Ontario continues to decline, so too does the number of individuals with an understanding of agriculture. Municipalities looking to support the growth of local food within their jurisdictions must have staff that are informed on normal farm practices, agricultural land uses, and the local food value chain. Staff should be knowledgeable of the Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) formulae, and provincial agricultural legislation, especially the *Nutrient Management Act (2002)* and the *Farming and Food Production Protection Act (1998)*. Staff that have an understanding of agricultural practices will be better equipped to evaluate the impacts of development and policy on the local food system. One way in which staff can become more

informed on agricultural practices is through the development of an agricultural advisory committee (*Action One*), as they work alongside farmers and other members of the agricultural community to develop policies that support the sector. In their *Guide to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality*, the OFA states that “planning staff that recognize agricultural challenges and enjoy working with farmers are more likely to reach practical, mutually-beneficial solutions.”¹⁵

Example- Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance – Agricultural Applications Workshop

In 2014, The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance hosted a workshop with the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and the Region of Durham on “Streamlining Process and Approaches to Agricultural Applications in Municipalities and Conservation Authorities”. The workshop was targeted to an audience of municipal planners, economic developers and building department staff to discuss the barriers of processing agricultural applications. Barriers discussed included: interpreting regulations, understanding proposals, overregulation/ contradictory regulations as well as communication barriers and working with frustrated landowners.¹⁶ The main deliverable of the workshop was a list of recommendations and solutions to overcome these barriers. These recommendations include: having staff that understand agriculture; site visits with the farmer and planner who will be processing the application; having clear, consistent rules specific to agriculture; consulting the agricultural community when undergoing regulation changes; and agricultural knowledge/ training for economic development staff.

Important Agricultural Legislation

- ☞ Farming and Food Production Protection Act, 1998
- ☞ Nutrient Management Act, 2002



Action Six: Encourage Innovation with New and Established Farm Businesses

Why is encouraging innovation with new and established farm businesses important?



Aside from protecting agricultural lands, farm viability is also dependent on many other factors. Farmers in Northern Ontario have had to adapt and diversify their operations with each season. Some of these operations are featured as case studies in *Section 5* of this toolkit. With climate change creating new challenges and opportunities, existing and prospective farmers can continue to innovate based on the associated challenges and opportunities. As agriculture has been recognized as an important economic driver in Ontario, and the importance of supporting local food systems gains momentum, Northern Ontario municipalities can encourage innovation and growth in their farming communities by sharing the many resources available to them. The Northern Ontario

Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) provides funding for agricultural operations through their *Northern Business Opportunity Program* and has also provided funding for regional tile drainage and land clearing projects.¹⁷ The *Canadian Agricultural Partnership* (CAP) is a five-year, \$3 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the agriculture and agri-food sector.¹⁸ Research and innovation are at the core of CAP funding, which delivers its funding through strategic cost sharing programs.¹⁹ The Government of Canada's economic development organization, FedNor provides financial support for innovative agricultural projects by supporting such organizations as the Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN) and the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA) which administer funding to farm businesses and organizations through their programs.²⁰

Example- SNAPP (Sustainable New Agri-Food Products & Productivity Program)

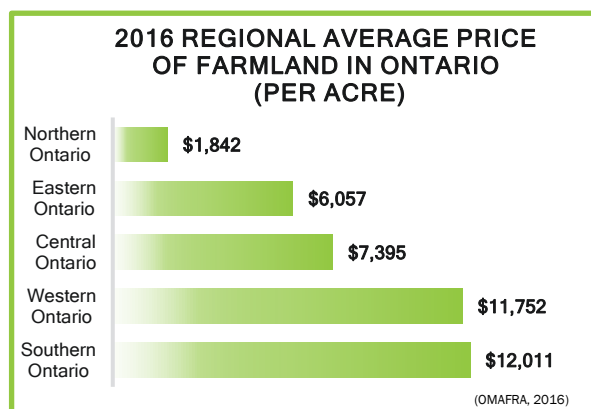
The SNAPP program is administered through RAIN, which is an organization that works to enhance agriculture and local food in Northern Ontario by supporting farmers and communities. SNAPP has four project streams in which farm operators can apply for funding: 1- Season extension; 2- New products; 3-Productivity enhancement; and 4- Clean tech in agri-food. To date, SNAPP has provided over \$850,000 to 165 different projects across Northern Ontario.²¹



Action Seven: Encourage New Farmers

Why is encouraging new farmers important?

The importance of encouraging new farmers is striking when considering the facts. The average age of a farm operator in Northern Ontario is 55 and in 2016, Statistics Canada reported that 92 per cent of Canadian farms have no written succession plan.²² The future of agriculture and local food relies on encouraging and supporting the next generation of farmers. Recently, there has been a small migration of new farmers to Northern Ontario. One of the driving forces behind this migration is the high cost of farmland in southern Ontario. OMAFRA calculated the regional average price of farmland in 2016, with the cost of one acre in Northern Ontario being 6.5 times cheaper than that of one acre in southern Ontario.



For those looking to start farm operations in Northern Ontario, OMAFRA has some resources to support this development. Recently, an online course, *Starting a farm in Northern Ontario*, has been developed by OMAFRA to assist those looking to start farm businesses in the north.²³ The province has also created general guiding documents for new farm entrants: *How to Start a Farm in Ontario*²⁴ and *Get a Strong Start- Business Resource Guide for New Farmers*.²⁵

Encouraging the next generation of Northern Ontario farmers should start with local high schools, colleges and universities to create opportunities for internships, scholarships and skill development. Those involved in economic development should also host training workshops and outreach to promote agricultural business development in their areas.

Example- College Boréal Agricultural Technician Program

College Boréal is an excellent example of training the next generation of Northern Ontario farmers through their agricultural technician program. The program is unique to Northern Ontario and has both an animal and plant sciences focus. Students in the program must complete a mandatory summer work placement on an area farm, as well as complete a small business project in an incubator-like environment. Aside from training the next generation of Northern farmers, the program also has an opportunity to tap into research funding and expertise that will benefit area farmers.²⁶

COLLÈGE BORÉAL
éducation • innovation • recherche

Action Eight: Build Partnerships with Other Municipalities

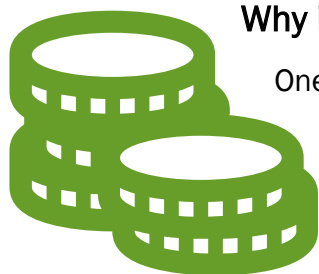
Why is building partnerships with other municipalities important?

Agricultural activities are not confined by municipal boundaries. Often, producers must travel large distances outside their local area to access various farm services and supplies for their operations. It is beneficial for municipalities within a foodshed to work together to promote local food and support the agricultural and food processing activities occurring in their region. By sharing information and resources, Northern Ontario municipalities can better support the growth of the local food sector in the north. An excellent example of cross-municipal collaboration is the Northeast Community Network, which is profiled in *Section 4* of this toolkit.



Action Nine: Invest in Local Infrastructure

Why is investing in local infrastructure important?



One of the major challenges for Northern Ontario producers is distribution and the costs associated with the transportation of goods. To better support and enhance local food production in Northern Ontario, municipalities must invest in rural roads to maintain these essential transportation networks. With the expansion of agricultural activities in Northern Ontario, it is also important that public works departments consider and incorporate design

features to support roads and bridges that accommodate large farm equipment. In Northern districts with Old Order Mennonite communities, consideration should also be given for larger shoulders to accommodate alternative modes of transportation in addition to farm equipment, with proper signage posted as a warning to other motorists. When such roads are maintained by MTO and not the local municipality, provincial outreach is required. Several districts with existing Old Order Mennonites have invested in this local infrastructure and it has been widely praised by the local Mennonite community. Depending on the size and scale of agricultural activities in your region, investing in rail infrastructure is another innovative option.



Action Ten: Get to Know your Farm Organizations

Why is getting to know your farm organizations important?

The provincial farm organizations represent farmers from all commodity groups and have valuable resources (*opinion papers, guides, policy recommendations*) that municipalities can utilize to better support agriculture and local food production in their jurisdictions. By connecting with the various farm organizations, municipal staff can gain a better understanding of the diverse perspectives within the agricultural community.



The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is the largest general farm organization in Ontario with over 37,000 farm members that advocates for a sustainable farming and food sector.²⁷ The OFA has 52 localized County Federations of Agriculture that allows for strong, local representation, and has 31 organizational members representing most of Ontario's commodities. It is the only accredited farm organization that has 21 trained Member Service Representatives in 15 locations across the province to provide service to members and eight farm policy research staff.



The National Farmers Union of Ontario (NFU-O) “works for family farms, not just the big guys.” The NFU-O has 22 different ‘locals’ across the province with acting voluntary presidents. The NFU-O has 8 elected council positions. Every member of the farm family, including the farmer, their spouse and children (14-21) are full voting members of the union. By allowing all farm family members to vote, the NFU recognizes that every family member contributes to the farm in some respect. The NFU-O advocates on a local, national and international level for alternative food systems and policies that resist the corporate control of food.²⁸



The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) represents over 4,000 family farms, including full-time commercial family farm entrepreneurs, part-time, hobby and life-style farmers. It currently has 21 district associations and holds province-wide meetings and educational sessions regularly. The CFFO “promotes family enterprise, resource stewardship, family values and rural community economic development.” The CFFO’s mission is to “reflect the Christian commitment of its members through development and advocacy of public policy perspectives that encourage thriving, profitable, sustainable, and responsible family farms.”²⁹

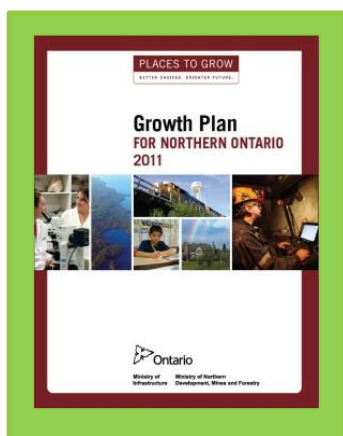


The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) has been committed to ecological and organic farming since 1979. The EFAO was initially established to promote ecological agricultural methods and to share the knowledge of their agricultural practices. The EFAO is “run by farmers, for farmers” with a commitment to “growing real food while improving our soils, crops, livestock and the environment.” The EFAO is governed by an 8-member board of directors representing members from across the province.³⁰ The EFAO strives to create a sharing community of farmers; to develop programs on ecological agricultural methods; and to increase public awareness and support for ecologically grown products.

Section Four: Growing the Local Food Sector in Northern Ontario

Strengthening agriculture in Northern Ontario has become a priority for the Province with the development of innovative policies to support and grow the sector. The development of these policies has fostered increased investment and research into supporting Northern Ontario agriculture. Northern Ontario is home to several organizations and initiatives that are dedicated to supporting and growing agriculture and local food in the north. This section briefly profiles these policies and organizations and highlights the importance of their work.

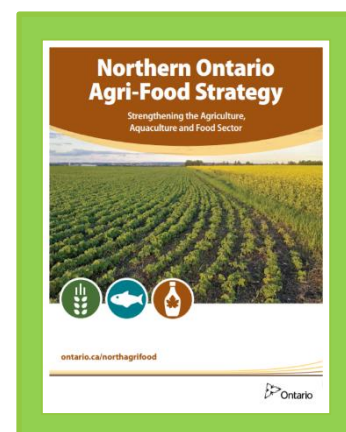
4.1 Policies



The *Growth Plan for Northern Ontario* (Growth Plan) was developed in 2011 by the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to guide decision making about growth in the North for the next 25 years. The Growth Plan is a result of extensive consultation with thousands of Northerners who identified opportunities, challenges and priorities for growth. The Growth Plan's key goal is to develop "a strong, more diversified and resilient Northern economy that offers a variety of employment opportunities for the people of Northern Ontario. The Growth Plan identified 11 existing and emerging sectors for economic growth which included food processing, aquaculture and agriculture. The Growth Plan's vision, in part, emphasizes the importance of collaboration by stating that in a new Northern Ontario "communities are connected to each other and the world, offering dynamic

and welcoming environments that are attractive to newcomers. Municipalities, Aboriginal communities, governments and industry work together to achieve shared economic, environmental and community goals." ³¹

As a result of the priorities outlined in the Growth Plan, a discussion paper on agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector growth was released in May 2016 by OMAFRA. This discussion paper informed a draft strategy framework for the *Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy*. Upon receiving feedback from a diversity of stakeholders including representatives of agri-food businesses and associations to First Nations and Metis communities, the *Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy* was finalized. The strategy identified five strategic directions to drive growth which include: 1-Foster a culture of innovation; 2- Strengthen Northern primary agriculture and aquaculture production; 3- Strengthen Northern food processing; 4-Increase Northern consumption of food produced in the North; and 5- Increase opportunities for Indigenous people and communities to participate in economic development in the agri-food sector in Northern Ontario. ³²





4.2 Organizations and Initiatives



The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) was established in 1988 to “promote and stimulate economic development initiatives in Northern Ontario by providing financial assistance to

projects that stabilize, diversify and foster the economic growth and diversification of the region. The NOHFC provides economic development funding to approved projects for all ten of the Northern districts. Agriculture, aquaculture and food processing are a few of the existing and emerging sectors in which the NOHFC provides funding.³³ It was announced in April of 2018, that the NOHFC was investing \$15.6 million in 27 agricultural projects in Northern Ontario. These investments include funding studies that will support the agricultural sector; land clearing and tile drainage; and agricultural facility expansion.³⁴

FedNor is the Government of Canada’s economic development organization for Northern Ontario. It supports a network of 24 Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) in Northern Ontario. CFDCs are non-profit organizations that assist local businesses with financing, and financial and business planning. Through its *Northern Ontario Development Program* (NODP), FedNor invests in projects that foster community economic development, innovation, and business growth. To date, FedNor has invested \$235 million through 838 projects in various sectors in Northern Ontario.³⁵ FedNor provides funding and support for both the Rural Agri-Innovation Network and the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance who are dedicated to supporting and growing the agricultural sector in the north.



The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) provides direct support for agriculture and local food initiatives in Northern Ontario through their regional agriculture and economic development advisors and crop advisors located in seven offices across Northern Ontario.³⁶ OMAFRA also supports the agricultural sector of Northern Ontario through the development of policy and guiding documents that have been previously outlined in this toolkit. More recently OMAFRA

has partnered with the Beef Farmers of Ontario and local municipalities in a Northern Livestock Pilot project, that looks to “create sustainable, meaningful economic development and diversification opportunities in the North.”³⁷

The Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN) is a non-profit organization dedicated to building “a resilient farm and food sector in Northern Ontario through innovative research and agriculture development projects.” It is steered by an advisory committee consisting of representatives from the farming, economic development, First Nations and local market communities. RAIN has dedicated staff that work with collaborators to conduct research and build capacity for producers across Northern Ontario. RAIN achieves its vision by providing support for farmers and food businesses while also collaborating with industry, government and communities to create initiatives that support farmers and agri-food businesses.³⁸ As was stated in Section Three of this toolkit, RAIN administers micro-grants to farmers through the SNAPP program. RAIN also administers funding for tile drainage and land clearing projects from the NOHFC, for Algoma, Manitoulin and West Sudbury districts.



The Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA) is a non-profit organization created “to develop strategies and partnerships to ensure the advancement of agricultural research and innovation in Northern Ontario.” It is governed by a board of directors and has an advisory committee with representatives from each of the Northern districts. NOFIA works to promote local food and agriculture in the north through research projects such as the *Dairy Processing Strategy* and by facilitating events such as the *Northeast Bites*, and *A Day in Farm Country*. NOFIA also administers funding from the NOHFC for tile drainage and land clearing projects.³⁹ NOFIA also received funding to create

farmnorth.com, which is a website that hosts Northern Ontario agricultural information and research for all the Northern Ontario districts.⁴⁰

The Northeast Community Network (NeCN) is an incorporated, regional not-for profit organization that “promotes collaborative economic development, applied research and support for forestry, mining, agriculture and tourism and business development.” It is governed by an executive committee and a board of directors. It is an excellent example of collaboration among municipalities, First Nations, the private sector and local economic development organizations in supporting regional initiatives. The NeCN has an Agriculture Steering Committee consisting of 10-15 volunteers representing various stakeholder groups. Since 2008, the committee has been involved in a variety of agricultural projects including working with the University of Guelph in 2011 on creating a report titled *Strategic Directions for Agricultural Development in Northeastern Ontario*, to currently facilitating applications for land clearing and tile drainage in the Cochrane District.⁴¹



Section Five: Local Food Initiatives in the Northern Ontario Districts

5.1 Themes within the Northern Local Food Movement

The following chart summarizes the main themes identified in each of the following case studies from all ten of the Northern Ontario districts.

	Kenora District	Rainy River District	Thunder Bay District	Cochrane District	Algoma District	Sudbury District	Timiskaming District	Nipissing District	Parry Sound District	Manitoulin District
Innovation										
Adaptation										
Planning										
Collaboration / Networking										
New Producers										
Policy										
Supportive Funding										
Grassroots										

5.2 District Case Studies

The following case studies were chosen to reflect the diversity of challenges that Northern Ontario producers encounter as well as highlight the motivations, opportunities and innovative ways in which local food stakeholders are overcoming challenges to enhance agriculture and access to local food in Northern Ontario. The information provided in the case study summaries was primarily collected through in-person or telephone interviews.



Kenora District – Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op



The Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op (CLFC) was established in 2013 and is a cooperative that operates through paid memberships, has two staff members and an eight-member board of directors as well as many volunteers. It now has over 1,400 memberships and has completed

several successful projects including the online interactive food map mentioned in Section 3 of this toolkit.⁴² The co-op has developed an innovative way to deliver locally produced food to Northern Ontario residents. The CLFC is the first online farmers' market in northwestern Ontario where producers list what products they have available for purchase and consumers log in weekly to purchase locally grown food of their choosing. The local food co-op has a central Dryden hub where online orders are taken for pickup and regional food hubs in Sioux Lookout, Ignace, Upsala and Kenora for more remote eaters.⁴³ More recently, the co-op has further expanded its reach to the rural and remote communities of Emo, Fort Frances, Atikokan, and Red Lake. What makes their food box unique is that consumers choose the seasonal products they receive, as opposed to traditional food boxes that offer little to no choice.⁴⁴ The co-op is also involved in increasing access to locally grown food available to northwestern Ontario residents through its educational and advocacy efforts.

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

The CLFC was created out of a need for Dryden area farmers to connect and to grow the agricultural community in the area.⁴⁵ Prior to the CLFC's development, there were few opportunities for northwestern producers to come together and sell their products. Access to markets was very limited, available seasonally, and competition with larger southern farms stymied opportunities for smaller, northern farms to grow their operations. Given the inherent geography of northwestern Ontario and the economies of scale for smaller farms, it was decided that an online cooperative model would best allow small farmers in the region to thrive.⁴⁶

Key to Success

One of the keys to the co-op's success has been the development of agreements and partnerships with local food service wholesalers, who assists in the distribution of food to their expanding service area.⁴⁷ The weekly cycle of deliveries also allows producers to coordinate the delivery of their products, further reducing their transportation costs. At the core of the CLFC's success is its ability to create and maintain networks that connect individuals and organizations to support a strong local food movement. The figure at right demonstrates the complex network of stakeholders and interactions that contribute to the CLFC's ongoing success.⁴⁸

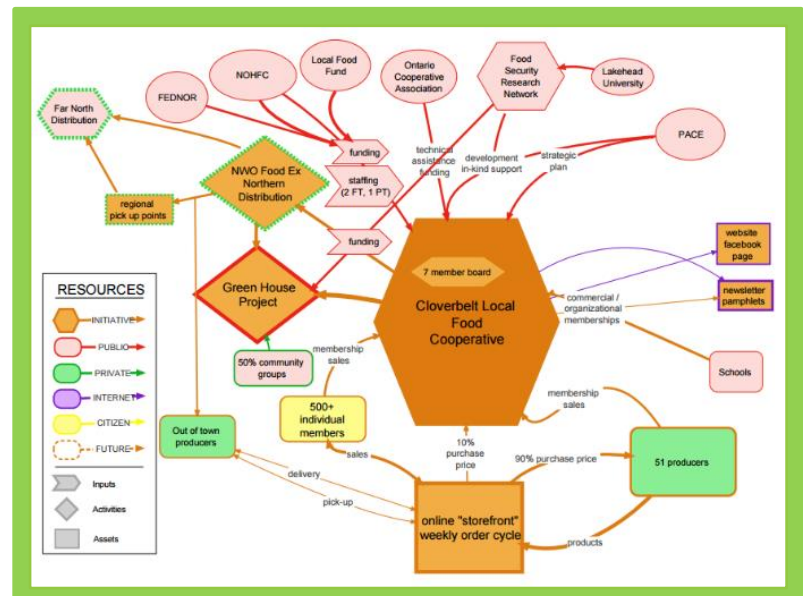


Image Source: www.cloverbeltlocalfoodcoop.com/how-it-works/



Rainy River District – Rainy River Meats

Rainy River Meats

Rainy River Meats is a small butcher shop and retail outlet located in Emo, in the Rainy River District of Northwestern Ontario. They offer a variety of meats including beef, pork, chicken, lamb, rabbit and pickerel in fresh, frozen or vacuum-packed quantities. Their products are available to purchase from their retail location in Emo, at one area farmers' market and online through the Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op. At their Emo location, they also retail a variety of locally produced goods as well as offer custom cut and wrap services for provincially inspected meat.⁴⁹

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

There is a rich, century-long agricultural history in the Rainy River District that has evolved over time. The district suffered when the local abattoir, Stratton Meats, closed in 1996. In 2010, with a recognized need for an abattoir, the Rainy River Regional Abattoir opened and Rainy River Meats was established in 2011. Rainy River Meats is owned and operated by four farm families that share the common goal of creating a business to support local livestock producers and provide local products to their community.⁵⁰ Similar to other areas in the province, there are several challenges to producing food and competing in a global market. With respect to meat processing, high taxes and legislation are additional challenges that small-scale abattoirs, like the Rainy River Abattoir, must overcome. Given that abattoirs are classed as industrial, they pay the highest property taxes, and small-scale processors are greatly impacted by that level of taxation.⁵¹ To maintain competitive prices, costs of production need to be minimized along the value chain, beginning at the abattoir. Despite the challenges, Deb Zimmerman, one of the owners of Rainy River Meats notes that “the younger generation seems to be a little more aware of what’s going into their mouth, more so than the older generation” which is contributing to a growing market for locally produced food.⁵²

Key to Success

The key to Rainy River Meats' success is the collaboration between the four farm families and their commitment to the business and supporting local producers. The Rainy River district is witnessing growth in consumers looking to buy local food and those becoming more aware of the importance of farmers. The District is also experiencing growth in crop production and has an established regional branding campaign called 'Rainy River Raised', which is contributing to the growth of local food consumption and Rainy River Meats will be there to continue to fulfil its communities' needs.⁵³



Image Source: <http://www.rainyrivermeats.com/>



Thunder Bay District – Brule Creek Farms



Brule Creek Farms was established in 2008 when owners, Jeff and Andrea Burke, bought a small parcel of land down the road from where Jeff grew up on a dairy farm. Jeff always had an interest in agriculture and as a university student, his involvement in a research project at Lakehead University examining sustainable local food systems and the role of a grain mill solidified his choice to become a crop farmer.⁵⁴ In their first year, Andrea and Jeff planted 17 acres of wheat and began constructing their flour mill. Within their first year of production they began milling their wheat and selling it at the Thunder Bay Country Market. They are committed to using heritage methods to deliver a

quality, traditionally-milled product. Andrea and Jeff currently farm 225 acres of wheat, rye, canola and cover crops and process these crops into a variety of flours, baking mixes and cold-pressed canola oil. They currently sell their products online and through farmers' markets, retail stores, restaurants and bakeries across Northwestern Ontario.⁵⁵

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

The north has the inherent challenge of increased distances to markets and lack of infrastructure to support local food processing. Jeff and Andrea knew that to create a successful farm business, they would need to have their own on-farm processing, with value-added products. Traditional large-scale cropping where the raw product is shipped down south for processing was not what the couple had in mind. Instead, the couple's commitment to providing Northern residents with quality Northern grown products has been made possible through their innovative and self-sustaining business model of remaining local. In 2017, Brule Creek Farms received the *Premiers Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence* for their canola crop and their line of cold-pressed, extra virgin canola oil.⁵⁶

Key to Success

The success of Brule Creek Farms is attributed to Jeff and Andrea's agricultural innovation and their commitment to producing a quality, uniquely Northern Ontario grown and processed product. Brule Creek Farm was also the recipient of a micro-grant from the Rural Agri-Innovation Network's SNAPP program (as outlined in Section 3 of this toolkit). Brule Creek Farms received SNAPP funding for an oil-press that has allowed them to create their cold-pressed, extra virgin canola oil, which now accounts for 24% of their farm's total revenue. They sell the leftover high-protein canola meal for livestock feed and the excess oil is used to power their tractors, which has reduced their fuel use by 25%.⁵⁷



Image Source: <http://www.brulecreekfarms.ca/about/>



Cochrane District – JK Gardens



JK Gardens is owned and operated by Jean and Kathy Genier and it is in the village of Genier, just north of Cochrane. Jean's grandparents originally owned the farm with the land first cultivated in the 1920s. Over time, the original farm has been subdivided down to the 12 acres where JK Gardens currently operates. Jean and Kathy are in their 8th year of production operating on 12 acres with four greenhouses, two acres of orchards, and pick your own raspberries. In addition to laying hens, they produce 29 annual crops and also sell a variety of value-added products including jams, pickles and salsa from their leftover produce.⁵⁸ They distribute their products through a CSA, the Cochrane Farmers' Market, a CSA in Matheson, as well as partnering with some local restaurants. They are one of a few

certified organic farms in Northern Ontario, which gives them a competitive advantage while also providing some additional challenges.

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

In terms of growing certified organic vegetables, Kathy Genier notes that it is difficult to find high quality organic seedlings in the north, so she utilizes seed saving practices and starts her own plants from seed.⁵⁹ Climate in the north has always been a challenge for Northern producers, but climate change has resulted in even more unpredictable weather patterns leaving Northern producers like the Geniers' having to adapt.⁶⁰ An additional challenge that JK Gardens faces is that farmers from Southern Ontario are buying up land in Cochrane and are planting large commodity crops. According to Kathy, this activity has increased taxes in the area, while at the same time having a negative impact on local communities as these landowners choose to farm the land in the North, while continuing to live in the South.

"A food charter just might be something that pulls everyone together. It doesn't matter what you grow, whether it's beef or mushrooms, try to eat local- it supports the tax base and the people that live here"

- Kathy Genier

Key to Success

JK Gardens success is due to building good relationships with neighbours and customers as well as working with nature to grow the best quality produce they can.⁶¹ The Geniers' have adapted to the changing climate by creating microclimates on their farm by planting spruce and mixed wood, they rely on greenhouses to start their plants and use hoop houses and agri-blankets for season extension.⁶² Jean notes that he feels there is a change among younger people when it comes to eating habits and he is optimistic that buying local is here to stay. Kathy notes that coordination among the local food initiatives in the District would be beneficial in creating more opportunities for growers and supporting existing growers.



Image Source: <https://www.facebook.com/JkGardens/photos/>



Cochrane District – Fromagerie Kapuskoise



In 2011, François Nadeau was travelling in Asia, where cheese is rare, when he made the decision to learn how to make cheese so that he would never have to go without. It was this moment when his dream of making artisanal cheese and opening the Fromagerie Kapuskoise was born.⁶³ He began his training in Quebec and continued to hone his craft in France. Upon returning to Canada, he decided to set up shop in his home community of Kapuskasing. The Fromagerie Kapuskoise began cheese production in the summer of 2015 with overwhelming community support.⁶⁴ The Fromagerie currently makes artisanal cheese from cow, goat and sheep's milk, offering nine different cheeses named after local rivers.⁶⁵

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

As has been previously noted, producing food in Northern Ontario has the inherent challenge of increased costs of transportation, of which the Fromagerie has identified as a barrier in which it continues to overcome.⁶⁶ However, the main challenge in which the Fromagerie continues to face is regarding the regulations of cheese-making in Ontario. As Denis Nadeau notes, the current 'one-size-fits-all' approach to regulating cheese penalizes small-scale artisan producers as they are expected to comply and operate on the same level as large, industrial-scale cheese processing facilities. The costs associated with complying with these regulations is cumbersome for small scale producers, as well, the regulations are often counter-intuitive to the art of cheese-making.

"Paper mills and mines are not going to be the way of the future for us, because they are becoming more efficient and shutting down, and we won't become Silicon Valley. If we don't go for agriculture and value-added [production] up here, we're going to be seeing a dwindling population for a long time"

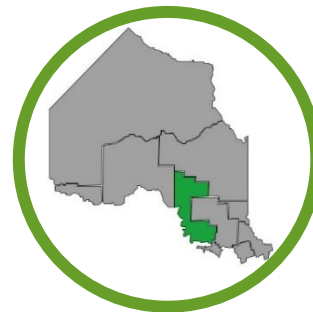
- Denis Nadeau

Key to Success

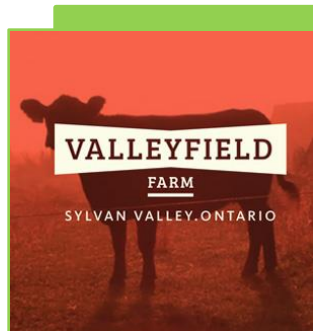
The success of the Fromagerie Kapuskoise can be attributed to the network of relationships built by both François and Denis Nadeau. In establishing the Fromagerie Kapuskoise, the Nadeau's created collaborative relationships with various local milk producers to create the necessary capacity for their production, as well as other local producers in supporting the sale of their products in their retail outlet.⁶⁷ They also attribute their success to the overwhelming support from their local community and both the municipal and regional governments.⁶⁸



Image Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Fromagerie-Kapuskoise/photos/>



Algoma District – Valleyfield Farm



Martti and Melanie Lemieux moved to the Sylvan Valley from southern Ontario in 2008. While Martti had family ties to the north, they were both new farm entrants motivated by the lower cost of land in the north. They were able to purchase 80 acres with a house for \$200,000, which is unheard of in southern Ontario.⁶⁹ They began Valleyfield Farm in 2009, practicing regenerative agriculture, a process by which farming practices support the development of rich topsoil, rather than depleting it, therefore growing nutrient-rich and flavourful produce.⁷⁰ Valleyfield Farm currently produces grass-fed beef and lamb, pasture raised pork and poultry, organically grown produce, farmstead baking and field-cut flowers.⁷¹ They currently offer farm shares and poultry shares (also known as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares), and they currently vend at the Mill Market in Sault Ste. Marie.

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

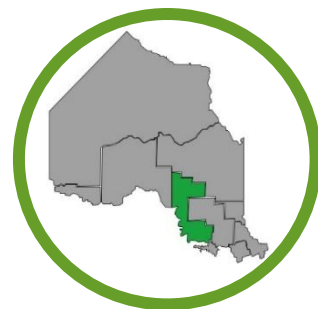
In their efforts to grow organic and natural food, they have encountered several challenges in acquiring organic feed. The logistics of trucking up special orders and the costs in doing so have been quite prohibitive.⁷² Melanie notes that unlike in southern Ontario, “if you miss the delivery truck, you can’t wait for the next one”, so determining the right amount of feed to order at a time has been a learning process. Melanie and Martti use bale grazing as a more practical, lower input solution to both feed their cattle in the winter while building and restoring their topsoil. Given the amount of livestock they have, access to an abattoir has also been a challenge. The local abattoir is at capacity most of the time and the next closest abattoir is in Massey, which is a 2-hour drive (one way) away. Melanie has suggested that a mobile abattoir would be an innovative solution to processing meat remotely.

Key to Success

Valleyfield Farms success can be partly attributed to their commitment to marketing their products and consumer education. They note that they spend a lot of time building close relationships with their customers, and that it is very important to develop an open farm relationship to truly connect with the eater. Valleyfield farm also notes that collaboration among farmers is vital to successful farming in the north. Valleyfield Farm is a part of “The Local 638” (pictured at right) which was developed to facilitate the movement of good food to customers in the Sault, as well as foster relationships within the farming community by sharing knowledge and equipment.



Image Source(s): <https://www.northernontario.travel/sault-ste-marie/>
<http://valleyfieldfarm.ca/>



Algoma District – Algoma Produce Auction



The Algoma Produce Auction (APA) was established in May of 2016 and is housed in a new 100'x 60' building located east of Desbarats. The APA is owned and operated by members of the local Old Order Mennonite community and is governed by a board consisting of five members, all Mennonites from the Bruce Mines and Desbarats area.⁷³ The APA is designed as a wholesale outlet for area growers to sell their produce for resale to various restaurants, grocery stores, markets, farm stands and consumers from Sudbury to Sault Ste. Marie.⁷⁴ The APA follows a similar model of existing produce auctions in southern Ontario. The APA, although a Mennonite initiative, is open to all growers in the Algoma District. The auctions occur twice a week from July to October and is open to the public.⁷⁵

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

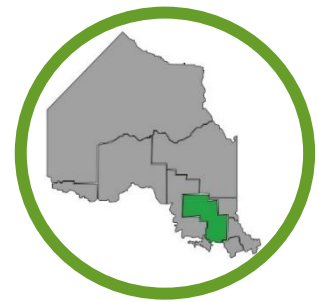
The APA was established in an effort to make family farms more viable.⁷⁶ In 2016, area Mennonites planted 25% more crops, in anticipation of greater sales through the APA. One of the main challenges that the Mennonite farmers face is being able to compete in modern markets given their self-imposed restrictions around the use of technology. The APA allows area Mennonites the ability to tap into the market and sell their products without the hassle of seeking out buyers.⁷⁷ The APA is an excellent example of an innovative way to connect Algoma farmers and wholesale buyers.

Key to Success

The APA is still in it's infancy, but two years after opening its doors it has witnessed substantial uptake by local buyers.⁷⁸ The APA's early successes can be attributed to the collaborative efforts between the Mennonite community, a former local mayor, and area residents. Given the traditional ways of the Mennonite community, coupled with the larger distances to markets in the north, the APA serves as a low-input hub where fresh, locally grown produce can better reach local retailers and consumers.⁷⁹ The APA is an excellent example of where innovative thinking and collaboration has been used to overcome barriers to local food distribution.



Image Source(s): Katherine Howes & Sara Epp



Sudbury District – Smart Greens Sudbury



Smart Greens is a company that sells greens within 100km of where they are grown. It is a network of indoor modular farms across Canada that grow pesticide-free, non-GMO greens.⁸⁰ Smart Greens-Sudbury is owned and operated by Erin Rowe and Stephane Lanteigne who aren't farmers by training, but initially contemplated the idea of container farming upon their return to Canada after teaching English in South Korea for 12 years.⁸¹ The couple was looking for a change in lifestyle that would allow them to spend more time with their daughter. So, they bought some property in Chelmsford, located outside of Sudbury, and decided to become the first modular farm in

northern Ontario as a part of the Smart Greens network. The farm produced its first harvest of kale within the first eight weeks, with subsequent weekly harvests averaging between 100-150 pounds. The couple also grows basil and microgreens which are popular with local restaurants. They currently distribute their produce through the Sudbury farmers market and farmgate sales.

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

Short growing seasons have always been a challenge for Northern Ontario producers, with the growing season averaging about 100 days.⁸² As a way to overcome this challenge, Erin and Stephane have adopted innovative technologies that allow them to grow greens year-round. The greens are grown hydroponically with specially designed LED lights that allow the plants to grow indoors, despite the weather outside.⁸³ Overcoming the Northern climate does, however, come at a cost as electricity rates are high and represent the farm's highest operating cost. Stephane puts electricity costs in perspective stating “..for every 1% of energy cost that I increase, I'm getting 1% in biomass, So, for us, the hydro costs are significantly offset by the fact that these plants grow quickly.”⁸⁴

Key to Success

In the initial stages of development, Smart Greens-Sudbury had to work with the local municipality to get approvals for this innovative method of farming. Working collaboratively with local municipal staff was crucial in the development of the farm. Support from the parent company was also vital in the development of their farm business. With an outlook on the future of Smart Greens-Sudbury, Stephane notes that Sudbury only produces 4-6% of its food locally and there are many opportunities to increase this amount using this type of farming. Erin and Stephane are currently looking to expand their operations given their initial successes.⁸⁵



Image Source(s): <https://twitter.com/smartgreensco>
Katherine Howes



Timiskaming District – Bison du Nord



Bison du Nord was founded by Pierre Bélanger and his father Laurent in 1972, with the idea of starting a bison ranch on the rough Northern Ontario terrain. 45 years later, the bison herd now has 250 animals on 500 acres, with Pierre working with his son Charles to manage the largest herd in eastern Canada.⁸⁶ Bison du Nord is located 20 minutes north of Temiskaming Shores where customers can purchase bison steaks and burgers as well as other foods grown and processed in Northern Ontario and

northwestern Quebec. Bison du Nord is an avid supporter of the local food scene and has attended the local food event, *Foire Gourmande*, in Ville-Marie, Quebec for the past 15 years, earning the People's Choice Award in 2016 for their BBQ bison slider.⁸⁷ They sell some products online and meat through local butcher shops.

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

Despite the inherent challenges of managing the herd, the Bélanger's note that the largest challenge is navigating regulations within the food industry.⁸⁸ In terms of selling their products in large distribution networks, they note that the requirements are too stringent for smaller, regional producers to comply with. In response to this challenge, the Bélanger's are developing sales to independent butcher shops and to independently-owned restaurants.⁸⁹

Key to Success

Bison du Nord's success can be attributed to their consumer-oriented approach. Given that their industry is smaller in comparison to the beef industry, the Bélanger's have dedicated much of their time to establishing their brand identity. The Bélanger's have worked with local chef's, processors and producers to create new products including dinner sausages, bison jerky and bison pepperettes.⁹⁰ The Bélanger's commitment to Bison is apparent, especially if you drive through the town of Earlton, where a 19-foot steel bison stands as an ode to the family's commitment to bison farming in the area.



Image Source: <https://bisondu nord.com/>



Nipissing District – North Bay Farmers' Market



The North Bay Farmers' Market is in its 16th year and is running a twice weekly market this season. The North Bay Farmers' Market is a year-round not-for profit corporation that is operated by vendors and volunteers, with an eight member board of directors.⁹¹ The market provides space for local producers and artisans within a 100km radius to sell

their goods. The market has 52 seasonal vendors, growing 47 different crops. The market opens the May long weekend and closes Thanksgiving weekend. Due to vendor demand, a winter farmers' market was established to allow those producers with extra goods and extended seasons the opportunity to continue to sell their products into the fall and winter. The winter market runs for 28 weeks, beginning at the end of October.⁹² In 2017, the winter market was located inside the city's oldest indoor shopping centre, and according to mall tenants, it has reinvigorated the mall. The farmers' market has been attributed to increasing traffic within the mall, resulting in increased sales within many of the mall's retail outlets.⁹³

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

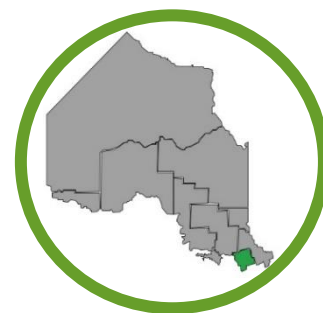
Farmers' markets face challenges of attracting and retaining consumers, inclement weather, and finding the most appropriate and accommodating location to host the market. The North Bay Farmers' Market continues to evolve and diversify to meet the challenges of best serving its vendors and the Northern community.⁹⁴

Key to Success

The North Bay Farmers' Market mission is to *“create reliable access to fresh and healthy locally grown food, support wellness and agriculture education and provide the opportunity for local farmers, food producers, artisans and community organizations to create a sustainable vibrant community.”*⁹⁵ In their mission to create a “vibrant community hub” the Market sets aside a subsidized community booth space, where local community groups or non-profits can promote their missions and outreach goals. It is through collaboration and partnerships with the North Bay Community that the Farmers' Market finds its success.



Image Source: Katherine Howes



Parry Sound District – Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve



**Grown
by the
Bay**

The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) is a globally significant region that was designated by UNESCO in 2004. The GBBR is a non-profit organization that “works with dozens of community partners to provide environmental education through conservation, and to create vibrant and sustainable communities.”⁹⁶ The Grown by the Bay program is a grassroots initiative that started in 2008 when a group of volunteers with an interest in local food, sustainability and

food security emerged within the biosphere action group.⁹⁷ These volunteers started by facilitating simple gardening workshops. Simultaneously, *Community Living Parry Sound* launched a community garden program, and partners like GBBR, Canadore College and the Town of Parry Sound supported the program to create a total of 7 community gardens to produce local food and donate 20% to food programs. One of the major projects that this grassroots group of volunteers conducted was the mapping of local producers (pictured below). Fortunately, the GBBR had funding for an intern that year that was able to help facilitate the project.

“The Biosphere scope has helped in raising the profile of local food. We know that local food is a global movement, and to know that a small town in Northern Ontario can be a part of that global education campaign to promote the question of “Where does my food come from?” is encouraging”

- Rebecca Pollock, Executive Director, Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

For non-profit organizations such as the GBBR, it is relatively easy to start projects and networking opportunities, however without the staff or dedicated resources it is difficult to maintain these initiatives.⁹⁸ Continuous support for local food initiatives through ongoing capacity development and structural funding would better serve the community.

Key to Success

The success of Grown by the Bay and similar initiatives can be attributed to the power of networking. These initiatives are the result of a collaborative effort between the GBBR, Community Living Parry Sound, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit and many others. As the demand for fresh, locally produced food continues to grow, initiatives like the producer map and directory will be essential in connecting producers to eaters in creating a sustainable food system in Parry Sound District.⁹⁹

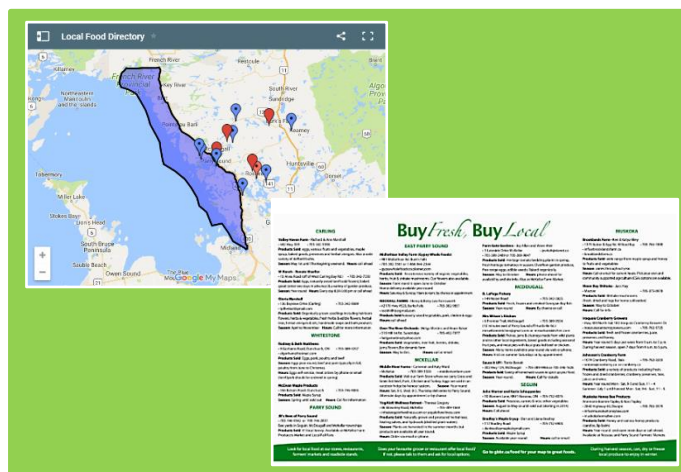
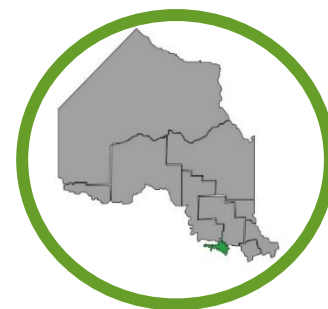


Image Source: <https://www.gbbr.ca/vibrant-communities/local-food/>



Manitoulin District – Burt Farm Country Meats



Max Burt bought the family farm from his parents and had always thought about vertically integrating the farm operation. This became clear when he culled and shipped two mature sows (that were roughly 500 lbs each) to a Kitchener sale barn and received \$75 for them. A few days later he received the bill for trucking them to the sale barn and was charged \$75. It was then that he realized he needed to do more of his own retailing, marketing and further

processing.¹⁰⁰ Max and his wife Joanne, state that “they are farmers first and business owners second.” Their animals are grown and processed completely on site, which not only creates less stress and a more humane way to process meat, but also results in a better tasting product.¹⁰¹ They currently offer a variety of beef, pork and poultry products from lean hamburger to smoked sausages to deli meats. They also have catering services with their beef or pork products for local events. They have an on-farm retail store open two days a week, with a few local restaurants using their products. Burt Farm Country Meats has also been the recipient of the Premier’s Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence- twice.

“I seem to give you all of the challenges far more than the opportunities, the reason I do that is because there are more of them.”

- Max Burt

Challenges and Opportunities in the North

When Max Burt applied for a loan at a local bank to create an on-farm retail space and a walk-in cooler, the bank manager told him that “shopping local was overrated” Max then decided if the bank didn’t share his vision, they couldn’t be partners in growing local food. Max then went to 10 of his neighbours and asked each for a \$1,000 loan, with the agreement that he would pay them back in \$200 worth of food per year for a 5-year term. He managed to get loans from nine of his neighbours, so he built a \$9,000 freezer.¹⁰² For Max, the most significant challenges are related to commercial taxation of his retail outlet and the provincial regulations in which he needs to comply. He notes that regulations are not unit-sized. For example, to make a cultured pepperettes, a \$1,000 pH meter and a \$900 water activity meter are required to test the product, even if it’s only 1 lb worth. Larger companies who are producing 3,000 lbs require the same two tools. Small scale producers do not have the economies of scale to take on this burden of cost.¹⁰³

Key to Success

The success of Burt Farm Country Meats can be attributed to the support from his neighbours, the community and his municipality. In 2015, they were also the recipients of provincial funding to acquire sausage making equipment to further diversify their farm business.¹⁰⁴ One of the main opportunities that Max Burt sees is that it is much easier to market ‘local food’ now than it was years ago, which bodes well for the future of Burt Farm Country Meats.



Image Source: <https://www.burtfarmmeats.com/about-us.html>

Section Six: Final Thoughts on Facilitating the Agricultural and Local Food Sector in Northern Ontario

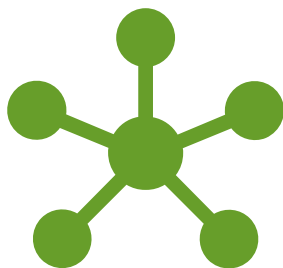
To address issues of food sovereignty/security in Northern Ontario, this toolkit was compiled with the intent to assist Northern Ontario municipalities on how to encourage and enhance agriculture and access to local food and ultimately, promote healthier Northern residents.

It is recognized that there are many actions that can be taken to improve access to local food in Northern Ontario; however, this toolkit identifies 10 actions that Northern Ontario municipalities can implement to support and grow Northern food production, which are:



- 1- Develop an Agricultural Advisory Committee
- 2- Create an Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy
- 3- Map your Agricultural Assets
- 4- Create Policies that are Supportive of Agriculture and Agricultural-Related Activities
- 5- Build Agricultural Knowledge of Municipal Staff
- 6- Encourage Innovation with New and Established Farm Businesses
- 7- Encourage New Farmers
- 8- Build Partnerships with Other Municipalities
- 9- Invest in Local Infrastructure
- 10- Get to Know your Farm Organizations

Based on interviews with various local food stakeholders in Northern Ontario there are opportunities for further networking and engagement between producers, organizations and municipalities to grow the northern local food sector. The Northeast Community Network demonstrates how municipalities can work together to improve their foodshed and the Algoma Produce Auction is an excellent example of where producers have come together to overcome the challenges of getting their goods to market. The North is very fortunate to have several organizations and government agencies (NOFIA, RAIN, OMAFRA, FedNor, NOHFC) working together to improve agriculture and local food access for Northern residents. These existing networks are critical for the Northern local food system and the province has a role to play in supporting and sustaining these networks over such a large geography.



To further support and enhance agriculture and local food in the North, it is essential to identify and evaluate the challenges that producers and processors encounter in getting their products through the value chain to the end consumer. The case studies included in this toolkit highlight some of these challenges from each of the ten Northern Ontario districts. The case studies also highlight the opportunities and innovative ways in which some Northern Ontario local food producers have stayed competitive and also stress the importance of collaboration and networking in strengthening local food initiatives.

In the development of the case studies, further recommendations to support and enhance local food in Northern Ontario have been developed. Several producers noted that promotion and marketing of locally produced goods to Northern residents is needed as well as the encouragement of a locally owned chain of co-ops or grocery stores selling northern produced food. These actions would build a local consumer base and therefore promote healthier northern Ontario residents. It was also suggested that in the development and enforcement of regulations, consideration of small scale producers/processors and northern Ontario conditions is crucial.

Given the compiled feedback from Northern Ontario local food stakeholders, it is intended that Northern Ontario municipalities can utilize the contents of this toolkit to encourage and further enhance agriculture and access to local food in Northern Ontario.



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