



Middlesex London Food Policy Council
Western Fair District Administration Bldg
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MLFPC is a forum for discussing local food issues, empowering citizens to be involved in food system decisions, and creating, evaluating and influencing policy. We are volunteers who collaborate across sectors in the food system throughout London and Middlesex County.

Dear

We know that food accessibility impacts every aspect of community health and well-being, and the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted that food is not an individual concern – it is a communal one.

Emergency food systems have been tested during the pandemic, and the need to support immediate food services, including food banks and school food programs, continues to grow. At the same time, this need reflects the lack of long-term stable and sustainable food systems. In a province with the agricultural production and potential of Ontario, **this is unconscionable.**

Access to locally-produced and healthy food shortens and increases stability of supply chains, creates a thriving labour market, addresses inequity, improves health, and supports sustainable agricultural practices. MLFPC, along with food policy councils and advocacy groups across the province, are making food a key issue in this campaign and would appreciate your responses to the question: **If elected, what will you do to address each of the following?**

1) Support for municipally- and regionally-led long-term food strategies

Each municipality and community understands best its own demographics and needs. Provincial support for local solutions could look like allocating resources for:

- agri-food research, and local food system assessments and initiatives, particularly focused on communities who are systematically marginalized or overlooked
- ensuring provincial legislation and regulations facilitate municipal and regional solutions for outdated bylaws and policies that impede urban agriculture activities
- tools and online platforms for data sharing
- concrete long-term strategies for expanding municipalities' capacity to coordinate extensive urban agriculture projects including soil testing, land reclamation, greenhouse gardening, distribution and composting facilities.

2) Prioritizing the preservation of agricultural land when commercial and urban developments are planned.

More than 200 different fruits, vegetables, grains and livestock are grown and processed in Ontario. According to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 5% of land in Ontario is prime agricultural land. Right now, the equivalent of 175 acres of this land is being lost to urban development every day. Losing the ability to produce our own food means further reliance on importing food, making us more vulnerable to disruptions in supply and price increases.

Prioritizing the preservation of agricultural land could look like:

- supporting meaningful and effective authority for local and regional municipalities in land management and urban growth
- ensuring full, open, and transparent public consultation processes on development projects and limiting the use of Minister's Zoning Orders
- considering all agricultural lands for protection similar to the to be treated like Greenbelt, with none or restricted development
- meaningfully honouring the leadership, knowledge and traditions of First Nations which allowed them to thrive here for millennia, without threatening the resources on which they depend; that knowledge which was almost obliterated by colonial settlement

3) Recognizing the essential nature of the agri-food industry

The Ontario government's Local Food Report 2021 reports that in 2019, the agriculture and agri-food sector in this province contributed \$47.3 billion to the economy and supported more than 860,000 jobs. Investing in the agri-food industry could look like:

- supporting agri-food producers for their adoption of sustainable agricultural practices
- local procurement policies
- supporting and calling on the federal government for rapid implementation of a national school food program
- increasing funding for career programs in agri-food and related areas
- reintroducing and expediting the process to pass Bill 216 *Food Literacy for Students Act*

These are only a few suggestions. We look forward to hearing your ideas. Given the significant contribution the agri-food industry provides Ontario, it is paramount that our provincial government takes steps to strengthen the industry. **Moreover, Middlesex County deserves representatives who prioritize the food-related needs of every person who lives, eats, and grows food in our county.**

The Middlesex London Food Policy Council thanks you for your time and careful consideration of our questions. It is only by working together that we can ensure Ontario's agri-food industry remains competitive, sustainable, and equitable.

Sincerely,
Dianne McComb, Secretary & Political Advocacy Chair