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Tuesday 22 October 2013

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Mardi 22 octobre 2013

Standing Committee on
Social Policy

Local Food Act, 2013

Comité permanent de
la politique sociale

Loi de 2013 sur
les aliments locaux

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Tuesday 22 October 2013

Mardi 22 octobre 2013

The committee met at 1601 in committee room 1.

LOCAL FOOD ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR LES ALIMENTS LOCAUX

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013 /
Projet de loi 36, Loi édictant la Loi de 2013 sur les
aliments locaux.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We'll call the meeting to order. Thank you very much for attending.

A matter of business: The deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 12 noon on the sessional day before clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, which is Monday, October 28, 2013. A hard copy and an electronic copy have to be filed with the office of the Clerk, Mr. William Short. Please note.

SUSTAIN ONTARIO

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We now have Sustain Ontario as our first deputant, if you would come to the table. You will have a five-minute presentation, followed by three minutes of questions from each party. When you have a minute left in your five-minute presentation, I will give you a little signal. You can continue right on; you don't have to acknowledge it. I'll politely cut you off at five minutes.

Thank you very much. If you would state your name for the purposes of Hansard.

Ms. Carolyn Young: My name is Carolyn Young. I'm the program manager at Sustain Ontario, the alliance for healthy food and farming.

Thank you to everyone for having us here today. We really appreciate the opportunity to have a chance to speak on this very important bill. We understand that the legislative committee on social policy is reviewing Bill 36, the Local Food Act, and has asked for submissions with regard to the bill.

Sustain Ontario is an alliance for healthy food and farming and was established in 2009 to be the provincial voice for organizations looking to improve our food system into one that is healthy, equitable, ecological and financially viable. Currently, the alliance has over 420 organizational members from across the province,

including the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. I think a lot of them are actually presenting to you, which is a really great sign that we are making an impact here.

Just to give you an example of some of our members, we have both the Holland Marsh Growers' Association and FoodShare on our advisory council. We have Ontario Nature and we have The Stop. We have a really cross-sectoral partnership with all of these organizations and alliances, and we search for cross-sectoral solutions to issues around food. That's a little bit about us.

First off, I want to say thank you so much, and I want to applaud the government in introducing Bill 36, An Act to enact the Local Food Act, 2013. Also, to those of you who have helped to move it along, we're really excited for it to get passed in the third reading.

Such legislation serves to highlight to the public the importance of local food and farming systems across Ontario, and when I use the words "food and farming systems," I am referring to everything from seed and inputs to eaters and to waste. We try and look at things from across the system, from retailers, distributors, growers, processors, eaters, etc.

Considerable work has been done already on developing local food systems, but much more needs to be accomplished across the province to ensure that Ontario's food system is healthy, equitable, ecological and financially viable.

We hope that the goals and targets spoken of in the Local Food Act will measure not just overall economic growth, but will also consider the measurement of local community resilience, for example, and economic development, but also the environmental impact of local food systems and, with the high standards that we have in Ontario, how we're comparing to other places, I think, and, the health outcomes that are related to local food for Ontarians and in improving our local food systems.

We appreciate that these goals will be published and the government will follow up with a report on the degree to which they have been achieved. We like a transparent approach, and we feel that this has been achieved to some degree with these consultations and how much people have been involved in this.

I also want to say that the inclusion of public metrics helps ensure action and achievement. We also hope that the government considers establishing an inter-ministry mechanism to ensure public policy and programming on food and farming come from various government departments and agencies and are better integrated and consider

input from engaging a wide spectrum of stakeholders, from farmers to consumers.

I think there have been some great opportunities in the last year to showcase this. For example, the Healthy Kids Strategy that's taking place right now and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy are areas where food is a central piece. There's really a great opportunity here to leverage both the Local Food Act and some of this other legislation and programs that are being put in place across ministries.

While Sustain Ontario looks for the timely passage of the proposed Local Food Act, we feel the Local Food Act should do more than promote awareness and strive to improve procurement. We believe the key to really accomplishing the goals of stronger food systems in Ontario lies in improving the food literacy of all Ontarians.

In the short term, this means food awareness programs, including nutrition and food preparation programming. Longer-term investment includes a strong food literacy component in our school curriculum and hands-on food skills training in our school system. Food literacy programming strengthens our local food system, but it will surely translate to a healthier population as well. We've attached a background on that as well.

We also believe that it's important to emphasize food access to culturally acceptable foods and nutritious foods, to all people at all times. This is an important issue and should be included in the Local Food Act as well.

Another piece is around our belief that "local" should not only be about Ontario food but also about strengthening our regional economies.

Finally, we strive to complete environmental goals. We hope that you will consider those with this Local Food Act as well.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll start with three minutes of questioning with the official opposition: Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. I think it pretty much covers off the gamut of what's in the bill.

I think there are two issues. One is the issue of education and how one would go about putting doing better education for our young people in the bill. The other one is the definition of "local," and you mentioned that near the end of your presentation. Of course, in the bill, "local" is defined as "Ontario." There was some discussion about the problem if you change that. How do you then define "local"? Is it so many kilometres? What if it's one kilometre further and you can't buy that? It runs into a bit of a problem. So if you could just give me a quick overview of your answer to those two.

Ms. Carolyn Young: Sure. On the subject of food literacy, I think that there's enormous potential within this. Obviously, we've gotten rid of our home ec curriculum in the past, and unfortunately, that has happened. I think teachers are a little bit fatigued with curriculum changes all the time.

But there's an enormous amount of energy and assets in this province of people who are working with schools to bring local foods into schools through student nutrition programs, but also through teaching kids how to grow and cook again from scratch, and understanding their food and agricultural systems.

I think that there's a real need to look long-term in trying to bring back those things into our school curriculum and educating teachers on how to do that kind of work. But in the short term, there's lots of support that can be put towards some of these groups, such as Food-Share, The Stop and some of the more regional student nutrition programs that are doing this kind of work in schools. They're working with teachers to bring in gardening programming and hands-on food skills into both after-school programs and into the classroom.

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As for the local food piece, we've just conducted a survey of over 280 people, most of them members of Sustain Ontario, who are really interested in local food. What they said, the general gist from that survey, was that they felt that there needed to be not only—I think the emphasis on the definition of "local" isn't necessarily the key thing. People want to know where their food comes from. It's about provenance, so when we're thinking about local food and supporting local food in some way, that there be a tiered approach, not only recognizing Ontario as local but recognizing, say, Ottawa as local, and looking to appropriate infrastructure and distribution for that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll move to the third party.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thanks for coming and for all the good work that you're doing across Ontario. There's some stuff that you didn't get a chance to talk about, and I'd like to ask you a little bit more about some of those things. You mentioned the Healthy Kids Strategy. There's a panel that was established. Ironically, it was called No Time to Wait, and we've been waiting for any kind of action for a year now. But some of these things that were put in there—there has been a bunch of food recommendations. The act itself that we have right now is enabling legislation. There's very little in it that actually will educate people in the province or actually move local food procurement.

Can you elaborate on some of these things that you have talked about here? You've talked about a school student nutrition program. How would that help to support local food?

Ms. Carolyn Young: I think leveraging some of this work that's been done to expand student nutrition programs—and my good colleague here, Alison from the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, can talk to you a little bit more. But connecting farmer groups and farmers in Ontario to schools is a great cross-sectoral approach to both increase support to farmers in Ontario but also increase access in schools to healthy foods.

But in addition to that, what we're saying is that it's not about giving kids food; it's also about interacting

with that food. It's also about interacting with those farmers and ensuring that there is programming at schools that is working around that food so that kids understand where it's coming from and that they have a chance to cook it, yes.

Mr. Jonah Schein: And you talked a little bit about metrics. Would you advise us around settings some goals around how much nutritious, local food was in our schools and how much food education was in the schools? Does that make sense to you?

Ms. Carolyn Young: I certainly think that our alliance is interested in increasing local food over the next few years. I think we can look to some other provinces for how they've approached this. But I also think that improving our targets is the main goal. Whether we set them or not is up to you fine folks.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We can move to the government. Mr. Crack?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Bonjour Carolyn, ça va bien? How are you?

Ms. Carolyn Young: Good, thank you.

Mr. Grant Crack: Good. Okay, so you had talked and just briefly mentioned targets in the legislation. Maybe if we have enough time, too, I'll just talk more about food literacy. But with regards to the targets, how do you see us moving forward with targets and being able to implement and hit those targets? And, maybe, what type of impact would that have on trade regulations or agreements as well?

Ms. Carolyn Young: Right. I think we definitely need to be careful as CETA and Canada are starting to look towards trade agreements—the Canadian-European trade agreement. But I also think that there's a need to work with public institutions to figure out targets. We have to set a benchmark for our targets to reach. So we have to know how much impact we're having on the local food system in terms of purchases now in order to actually impact on targets in the future. I think it's important to work with institutions to establish those targets.

Also, again, I think that it's important for our regional partners, for example, those in the north and those in the east, that we're not just talking about Ontario food alone, but we're giving some incentive to improve on our regional economic development. One thing I want to mention about that is that we include forest and fresh water foods in our definition of local food. In the Ontario north, those are the foods that are making an impact in terms of economic development and have an impact on some of our most vulnerable communities, such as First Nations.

Mr. Grant Crack: So, in your opinion, do you feel that these targets would be legislated or perhaps aspirational, that we could work towards them? What is the position?

Ms. Carolyn Young: It depends on who you talk to in our membership as to what their considerations would be. I think it's important to have targets and to monitor what we're doing. At the same time, I would say that if there's

a way to constantly improve that, then that is the best solution.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much, Ms. Young. Thank you for coming to the committee. We appreciate your input.

Ms. Carolyn Young: Thank you for having me.

ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We next call the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, a fine old organization of 135 years or so.

Ms. Alison Robertson: Oh, 150-plus.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Oh, 150?

Ms. Alison Robertson: I haven't been there since the beginning.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): You have five minutes for a presentation, followed by three minutes each from the committee. I'll warn you when you get to a minute left in your presentation.

Ms. Alison Robertson: Thank you. My name is Alison Robertson, and I am the program manager at the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. I work primarily with food access and student nutrition initiatives, specializing in procurement and distribution. Most of my work is with OMAF, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, as well as related industry organizations.

As an organization, OFVGA is very supportive of measures and initiatives that increase awareness and consumption of Ontario fruits and vegetables. We believe that one of the keys to building a stronger local food system in our province is improving the basic food literacy of Ontarians. People will not buy our products if they don't know what to do with them.

I'll give you a little quick story. I volunteer at the Royal Winter Fair. Last year, we had a loop going of horticultural planting and harvesting. A lady was standing watching. She was middle-aged and a very average, normal-looking person. I could tell she was going to ask me something. She turned at the end and said, "Carrots, they grow in the ground." I thought of a lot of smart things to say, but I said, "Yes, and so do potatoes and beets." How do you tell somebody like that to eat local or buy in season when they don't even know that carrots grow in the ground?

We really think the key is, like Carolyn said, home ec, education. These kids are our future consumers. They are our future voters. They will be involved in procurement when they're older, and they'll be using our health care system. So we have got to educate these kids about home ec, and I'm not talking about learning how to make Baked Alaska. I'm talking about mandatory—boys and girls, school gardens, understanding agriculture, basic food skills and learning what is local and why it's important to our economy. It's going to give them better

food choices, not just for themselves but for their families.

There are a lot of school-based initiatives that are going on. OFVGA has been involved for seven years with the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program. Every week, there are 36,000 servings of fruit and vegetables going up north, and a large percentage is Ontario product.

When we started this, a lot of parents said to us, “Oh, good luck. My kids don’t eat fruits and vegetables.” We found from the food handlers that at the beginning there was some waste. These kids had never had broccoli, cauliflower—and we’re not talking way up north, we’re talking Sudbury. The food handlers said that within a month the waste wasn’t there. The kids were eating it. The teachers said that within a few months fruits and vegetables were coming in their lunch boxes and then the parents started calling the school saying, “Where do I get mini cucumbers? Where do I get cherry tomatoes?” We created a market. Those were our little consumers. It was so easy. We were told by the teachers that kids were behaving better. Bullying was down. It was just win-win-win all the way along. This is a great opportunity with this food act to get kids more involved and get fruit and vegetables programs right across the province.

The Local Food Act is also an opportunity to expand local food in our broader public sector institutions—schools, universities, hospitals—and I think it’s got to be more than aspirational. I think we have to set goals. When I attend fruit and vegetable and farm-to-school conferences in the States, they don’t worry about free trade. They just say, “You’re going to buy local. You’re going to buy state. You’re going to buy country.” There are points systems for local product. It’s a delicate dance, but I think we’ve got to really push for this.

In order for the Local Food Act to be successful in supporting farmers, I think we have to reduce the regulatory burdens on farmers. I think that there are real issues, both horizontally and vertically, between ministries and between municipalities that can create some barriers for food production.

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Interjection.

Ms. Alison Robertson: Since I got the final tap there, I’m going to leave you with three things. I think that for the now, we have to set a procurement policy and go beyond aspirational. I think that for the future, we have to look at home ec; these kids are our future consumers, business people and policy-makers. And I think we constantly have to look at reducing these barriers to local food production and consumption. Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We’ll start with the NDP.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for coming.

Ms. Alison Robertson: You’re welcome.

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to just pick up a couple of points that you brought up, mainly about beyond aspirational. I think we would agree that this bill is completely aspirational, and I think there’s a difference

between setting out “thou shalt do this and this and this” and “thou may do something far off in the future.” Could you expand on what you think would be something that would be more—

Ms. Alison Robertson: More teeth?

Mr. John Vanthof: More teeth than this.

Ms. Alison Robertson: I think that if we make it easier for people—I think that for school programs under Children and Youth Services, it’s daunting for some of these people that are getting the product. If they can work with grower groups, if we can develop a better infrastructure and make it easier for Ontario products to get to these institutions, whether it’s food hubs or whether it’s central procurement, I think it will happen naturally. I really do. We just have to make it easier for people. Most people, I think, want to do the right thing. It’s just that, a lot of the time, they just have to do what’s easiest, so we have to make it easier as an industry.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. And could you expand a bit on a very interesting project in northern—

Ms. Alison Robertson: Fruit and vegetable growers.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. Would that work province-wide? Because you mentioned Sudbury, and—

Ms. Alison Robertson: You bet it could work province-wide.

Mr. John Vanthof: —I don’t think Sudbury is much different than most of southern Ontario as far as buying product.

Ms. Alison Robertson: We chose one of the most difficult regions. In the winter, it’s not easy getting fresh product that isn’t frozen to Wawa, but we’ve done it.

Mr. John Vanthof: Wawa’s different than Sudbury.

Ms. Alison Robertson: Yes, and we go all the way up to Wawa. They had snow in Hornepayne this week, and we get product there, so we figured that if we can do it there, we can do it anywhere in this province. It would be a pleasure to work on that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Good. Thank you very much. To the government: Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much. I think we all really enjoyed hearing from your example about creating the school gardens and talking about relationships between farmers and students. Could you just explain what you meant by reducing the regulatory burden for farmers, and how that would actually relate to increasing the consumption of local food?

Ms. Alison Robertson: I am probably not the best person from our industry to talk about that, but I hear awful stories. This isn’t an awful story: The Premier wants our industry to increase sales, to increase investment, and yet I hear stories from our growers about the MOE classifying rainwater coming off their greenhouses as sewage. So, you’re running one way, and then you get pulled back another way.

Municipalities, the taxation: when you start doing value-added: You have a large farm operation; they’re going to do baking apple pies as well as picking at the orchard, and then you get sidetracked with some of the municipal issues.

I think different ministries, both horizontally and vertically, have to understand how important agriculture is—the jobs it brings, the barriers we have—and work together to work through these so that agriculture can be successful and we're saving farming, not just farms.

Mr. Grant Crack: Okay, thank you. And you talked about goals and targets; my colleague from across the way had indicated set targets. From our perspective, we think that that's quite a difficult thing to legislate, and that's why this bill has been designed as such. I guess you could say it's aspirational, but it's also very encouraging, and we're hearing a lot of good feedback from stakeholders that we're on the right track.

Could you just confirm, one way or the other: Are you in favour of legislated targets? And if so, maybe you could provide some input on how we could actually work to set those targets.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): A brief answer would be appreciated.

Ms. Alison Robertson: Okay. Again, I guess I would go back to my answer there for the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program, our first year. We run from January to the spring, right out of season for Ontario product, and we still manage 73% Ontario product. That was through working with grower groups. We didn't have the targets; we just wanted as much local product in there as we could, and by working with Ontario fruit and vegetable growers, that's what we were going to push. You work with the right stakeholders and you have realistic targets.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. You mentioned apple pie, so I gave you a little extra.

Ms. Alison Robertson: I knew who you were, so I thought I'd mention apple pies.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We'll move to the opposition. Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. Since we're all talking about the three-pronged approach—the aspiration, the goals, and the targets and the hard caps or the hard targets—I think that's really where we somewhat have a difference of opinion. I don't believe you can have aspirations unless you have something to aspire to, and I don't believe that this bill does that. The question becomes whether we're aspiring to a target that we hope to achieve. If we achieve it easily, chances are, next year we should set it higher.

The other one—and I think that was mentioned by the parliamentary assistant—is that you put in, “We shall meet this goal every year, starting right now,” and mandate people that they have to meet that. Would you have any problem with setting the target as to, “That's what we want to aspire to,” and hopefully we hit it? Recognizing that the bill does include a section that says that every three years, the minister must do a report and post it on the website as to how we are doing in our aspirations, how do you define how we're doing if you haven't set any aspirations?

Ms. Alison Robertson: That's a tricky question. I think there has to be beyond vague aspirations. Maybe

we have to look at some of the other local food acts around this continent and see how they handled it, but I think you certainly need that goal; I do. I just don't know quite how you do it. But I think you need more than an aspiration; I think you do need some type of realistic, reasonable goal, and review it every few years and keep pushing the envelope.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: But you don't see any need to have hard targets, to say, “Everybody must achieve this,” legislatively?

Ms. Alison Robertson: That may be hard to enforce.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Exactly. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you, Ms. Robertson. Thank you for attending.

Ms. Alison Robertson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Say hello to Art Smith for me.

ONTARIO APPLE GROWERS

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We'll now move to the Ontario Apple Growers. Mr. Gilroy, welcome to the committee. You have five minutes, followed by three minutes of questioning. When you have about a minute left, I'll give you the tap.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Sounds good.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): As it's called now.

If you could identify yourself for the purposes of Hansard.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: My name is Brian Gilroy. I'm chair of the Ontario Apple Growers and a member of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' board.

Good afternoon. I'm an apple grower from the Georgian Bay area. The Ontario Apple Growers is an organization of 215 commercial apple farmers. We produce about 42% of Canada's apples, with a farmgate value of somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$70 million. We grow a wide number of varieties of apples, but there are 17 major varieties sold through the retail chains.

An interesting note about apples is that we don't grow enough apples to meet the demand of any of the varieties that are sold at retail. So there's incredible opportunity for us to expand what we grow.

It's a fairly unique sector in the sense that almost all of the apple-growing area in the province is fairly close to a major body of water: Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. The growth of a strong local food movement in recent years has been a significant positive for Ontario's apple farmers. We are fortunate to be able to benefit from the popular Foodland Ontario buy-local campaign, which is well recognized among consumers and is the envy of many jurisdictions. As well, retail stores are familiar with the program and allow point-of-sale materials to be placed next to in-store displays of Ontario-grown products. Despite this, we must still compete with international competitors on size, quality and, most significantly, price, to make it onto Ontario retail store shelves.

In normal years, Ontario apples are in the retail stores for 10 to 12 months. This is where a Local Food Act can help. As an organization, we support programming that will increase awareness and consumption of Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables and other farming commodities. A fundamental cornerstone of a strong local food system is the food literacy of consumers. You've heard a fair bit about that already, so I'm going to skip through the importance of home ec in the schools and hope that that will continue to be looked into.

1630

Health care is the gorilla on everybody's back these days, and the consumption of fruits and vegetables can only improve the health of Ontarians. With apples, it's kind of a symbol of health, so we strongly encourage everyone to make sure that they have their apple a day because it keeps the doctor away.

There are other school-based initiatives that Alison has just talked about, so I'm not going to go into that as well, but I'm a huge supporter of the fact that—in remote communities, type 2 diabetes rates are 100%. We can do something about that. Alison is a great coordinator and can get fresh fruits and vegetables to those locations cheaper than anyone else. I would strongly encourage that both those programs be expanded.

Some initiatives have already taken place to encourage the development of partnerships between farmers, food processors and institutions. In many cases, this not only supports local farmers and farm businesses and provides healthy meal choices, but buying local can also result in cost savings for the institutions.

We hear a lot about sustainable. I'm a big fan of sustainability, but farmers need some help in making some adjustments to some of the social programs that are being pushed. This cleaner water stuff—I'm a big supporter of it; everybody is. But the cost that's passed on to farmers has to be balanced somehow. You heard about rainwater falling off a greenhouse roof being called sewage. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

We support ongoing investments in this area, as well as environmental farm plans, which help the farmer be more environmentally responsible and upgrade areas. For me, one of the big things is keeping wildlife out of my orchard. Deer are a huge issue, and up until recently, we were getting some help with fencing to keep the deer out. We strongly encourage those types of things to continue.

Should a Local Food Act be legislated? Should there be hard and fast rules as to how much local needs to be in there? Well, the major retailers in this province sell most of the food. There are wholesalers, yes, and targets there are relatively attainable if you make it worth their while and if you help with the coordination—oh, did you knock?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Yes, I did.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: I'm sorry.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): You've exceeded your time. Perhaps you can work in the rest of your comments during one of the questions, because the questions are usually very general.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Absolutely. A fast five minutes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We'll move to the government. Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Gilroy. Maybe just to change a little bit here, you had a bumper crop this year, from what I understand, especially compared to last year.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Some people, yes.

Mr. Grant Crack: Maybe you could just explain to us the type of work you do with Foodland Ontario and how you market some of these products, especially in the off-season, and how this act might help the apple growers.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Sure. Apples have been a consistent client of Foodland Ontario, and we've actually received a bit extra this year to try and regain some of the lost shelf space. That is greatly appreciated. We're working hard with them. We're actually going to be doing some consumer sampling in February of next year. Movement is usually very strong in the fall months when apples are on everybody's mind, but later, after Christmas, it slows down a bit. So let's hope that this consumer sampling in a variety of stores in the GTA will improve consumption, and also point-of-sale materials, in-store competitions for displays and those types of things.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you. I think my colleague has a quick question.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. I'd just like you to continue your train of thought when you were starting to talk about retailers there. I'm just interested in where you were going in terms of relationships with retailers, just when your time was intercepted.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Retailers need to be a lot more supportive of local food, period.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. Just in terms of what they need, because I know from your industry over the years, you've been improving quality, and because you have competition, mostly from south of the border—

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Yes.

Mr. John Fraser: So what have you done to increase that, and what more do you need from retailers? Is there stuff that they're asking you for that—

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Lower prices, lower prices, lower prices.

Mr. John Fraser: Lower prices. So that's what it is.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Yes. Last year, apples, even at retail, went up a bit, and those who had apples received a significant return for their apples. But with our costs constantly going up, we need more than what we were getting 20 and 30 years ago. Unfortunately, we're not getting a whole bunch more than what we were getting 20 and 30 years ago. You know what's happened with the minimum wage, the price of gas, electricity, all those things. If we want to continue being Canada's main apple-producing province, we're going to have to do some things to get more of that retail dollar back to the farmer.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: You're very welcome.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): The official opposition. Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you, Brian, for your presentation. I just wanted to go back to the apple a day and the health issue with eating local food. I always thought that the apple was actually the bribe because it was always the bright, shiny apple they took to the teacher. Now I realize that that was part of the education about local food in our schools that doesn't seem to exist anymore. Maybe that's what we need to do, is get education back to where the students come in with an apple. It would help your sales, and it would also increase the consumption of good apples.

But I really wanted to talk a little bit about the marketing of apples. You mentioned in the start of your presentation, in fact, that we don't produce enough to fill the market. We have to import. A lot of times I've noticed that the imports are not necessarily selling for less money.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: No.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: So it seems to me that we need to get something in place that actually deals with why they're buying imports at a higher price than they're willing to pay for Ontario apples. I wondered if you could tell me a little about that.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Well, let's see. Variety is a big thing. The Honeycrisp apple has been a godsend for a number of apple farmers who had the vision to plant those. They actually return to the farmer almost three times as any other apple. They're extremely hard to grow. That's why that price differential has been maintained.

Quality is a big thing, but we can compare—the whole national apple scenario was benchmarked last year through the Apple Working Group of the Canadian Horticultural Council, and I'd be happy to share the executive summary with anybody who's wanting to learn a bit more about how we do compare.

I think one of the big things is that Washington state produces as many apples as the rest of North America put together, and they have some very impressive marketing schemes that return millions of dollars to corporate head office at retailers in the way of volume discounts, promotional activities and those types of things.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. If we could move to the third party.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thanks for coming in and for your comments today. You brought up a few things that are important to me. You mentioned the idea of an apple a day keeping the doctor away. We could create a market for Ontario-grown apples through our school boards in Ontario.

In 2010, our leader, Andrea Horwath, brought up the idea of setting local procurement targets for public institutions. One of those could be a school board. We could get an apple a day to every kid in this province. That would support your growers and would reduce health costs, I think. How would this affect setting targets there rather than for retailers? Have you thought about that as an option?

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Sure. Almost every school board, every school, has a breakfast program. One of the problems is that the procurement system is helter-skelter. It's all over the map. If it was easy for people to access Ontario-grown for those programs, it would make a big difference to Ontario farmers, in my opinion.

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Mr. Jonah Schein: Do you think that's viable? Can we get an apple a day to every student in the province?

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Absolutely.

Mr. Jonah Schein: What do you think the trade-offs would be if we spent an upfront dollar on an apple or a penny on that apple—a pound for a penny.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: We need a few more pennies for that apple.

Mr. Jonah Schein: There's some sort of metaphor there—a pound of prevention—

Mr. Brian Gilroy: But somewhere in between we're about right.

Mr. Jonah Schein: A penny for a pound of prevention—something like that.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Sure. I think that overall the cost would be less for everyone involved if we can integrate procurement and need and the supply. If it can be integrated, coordinated—which is what Alison is an expert at—it can happen.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Student nutrition programs, breakfast programs are only about 10% funded right now by any kind of public funding, so we could bring that up much higher.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: I volunteered myself in some programs, and they're outstanding. They're being funded maybe 10% provincially but overall they are being funded. We're big supporters of all of those programs using as much local as humanly possible.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Good. Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Gilroy, for coming in. We appreciate your input.

Mr. Brian Gilroy: Thank you.

CHRISTIAN FARMERS FEDERATION OF ONTARIO

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We can move now to the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. Welcome, Lorne. You'll have a five-minute presentation, followed by three minutes each of questions. I'll tap when you've got a minute left. Would you identify yourself for Hansard, please.

Mr. Lorne Small: Lorne Small, president, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. I'm a farmer and what I produce is consumed locally, so I'm at that end of the spectrum.

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario thanks the committee for considering our comments relating to Bill 36, the Local Food Act. The organization represents many thousand farmers across Ontario. The CFFO supports the approach being fostered by the current draft that seeks to encourage education, awareness and promo-

tion of Ontario-grown food over the regulatory approach. We also see opportunity in the Local Food Act to do more to help create a sustainable local food system in the province.

We support the concept of soft targets. First, it avoids the pitfall of triggering trade disputes over legislated local content. Second, target-based requirements rather than hard regulations on local content allow for more flexibility across the public sector as public sector institutions have different budgetary constraints and a different clientele that they have to service. The CFFO believes that using discussion-based soft targets is the best method of decision to enter into play setting those targets. The discussion process needs to recognize the spending limitations of public institutions, grower costs and limitations within the local distribution system to arrive at actionable, realistic goals. Idealistic, blind targets serve no one well.

Education: The CFFO notes that the proposed act is a good starting place for improving knowledge and awareness around local food. The CFFO supports the concept of a local food week as an educational tool. However, having it overlap with agriculture awareness week is a double-edged sword. The danger is that the local food week will overshadow agriculture awareness week, reducing knowledge about primary production. However, should the proposed overlap proceed, primary agriculture must take it upon itself to leverage the focus on local food as an opportunity to let residents know where local food comes from.

Other areas of support: The CFFO supports the current definition of “local food” as being food produced or harvested in Ontario. A more narrow definition would trigger a negative regulatory burden for Ontario’s food production and processing systems.

Possibilities presented by the Local Food Act allow some opportunities for Ontario residents and farmers. The CFFO believes that the Local Food Act can serve as a mechanism to enhance other areas of need in Ontario that are related to food in the following ways:

First, the CFFO believes that providing tax credits to farmers and food processors for donations to the food bank will help facilitate stronger supply procurement for Ontario’s food banks. The CFFO believes that this will be a positive step in supporting low-income families in Ontario.

Secondly, the CFFO supports an enhancement of the Foodland Ontario marketing program that can be leveraged from the Local Food Act, including expanding its mandate to include the restaurant and food service sectors in Ontario.

Thirdly, the CFFO believes that the Local Food Act can be leveraged to create a market-development program similar to the discontinued Ontario Market Investment Fund. The fund can be used to launch a diverse range of initiatives within the Ontario marketplace that strengthen and grow support for local food by engaging food-producing and processing businesses as active partners in local food.

Finally, the CFFO believes that there is a critical condition that could be addressed by the Local Food Act: the lack of coordinated aggregation of fresh fruits and vegetables from family farms. The significant technical barriers to entry into the food supply chain prevent many family farm operations from supplying public institutions.

At the same time, the CFFO recognizes that public institutions do not have the resources to deal with a large number of farmers to source their local food supply, nor are there incentives to do so when successful food supply companies exist that can consistently deliver what is needed when it’s needed, heedless of the source of the food.

Therefore, the Local Food Act should include support for aggregators of local food supplies from family operations to bridge the gap between the need for market access by family farms and the need for consistent supply for public institutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate this opportunity to be here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much, Mr. Small. I appreciate your comments. We’ll move now to the official opposition. Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation, Lorne. We much appreciate it. I want to go just quickly to the soft targets that you mentioned. An earlier presenter talked about how we could set targets for wholesale, but you couldn’t do that for retail. I want to point out that at least my objective would never be to tell people what they can sell in their stores, but the biggest food purchaser in the province of Ontario is the government of Ontario when you look at all the places where they, either directly or indirectly, pay for the food. When you speak of soft targets, do you believe that putting targets in regulations to aspire to—would that be called a soft target, rather than saying you must have 20% or 5% or whatever of Ontario food?

Mr. Lorne Small: I have a personal dislike for regulations saying, “Thou must do this.” I’m much more willing to co-operate with you if you say, “If we agree, this is what we hope to achieve.”

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: But if you do it that way, Lorne, how do you know what it is that we want you to do, if there is nothing out there to say, “We would hope to get to 20% or 30% Ontario”—

Mr. Lorne Small: I think what our membership is saying is, have us at the table to discuss what we ought to achieve. If you say we’re going to achieve a 50% increase and we buy into that, then we’ll work towards that end, rather than saying, “Thou must do 20%.” It’s a conciliatory or co-operative approach.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: But you do believe that at some point you need some target that you’re going to work toward.

Mr. Lorne Small: Oh, yes.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I think that’s what we’re saying. That’s not presently in the regulation.

Mr. Lorne Small: And it needs to be measurable and achievable.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Yes, that's the word I was looking for: "measurable." I want to thank you for your comments about Local Food Week. I think we all agree that we need a local food week. We also agree that we need an agriculture week, and putting the two together will likely negate a lot of the benefits of both of them. So I think we do need to separate them and have them both.

Mr. Lorne Small: To me—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll move to the third party. Mr. Vanthof.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for coming. I'm also going to continue—as a farm organization, I take it you would spend quite a bit of time looking at the Local Food Act. In the act, as it stands, would you say that there are even soft targets in it?

Mr. Lorne Small: I don't really see a lot of soft targets in there, but it allows the opportunity to start the dialogue on a lot of these issues and engage a lot of different players in the discussion. I think our word is a good start.

Mr. John Vanthof: But since this is legislation, would you, as a farm organization—if it was on another topic like nutrient management or something, would you say that you would like to pass legislation that had not even a directional goal? Because in the Local Food Act, I don't even see who would be consulted. It is so broad that—

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Mr. Lorne Small: You're correct. There's not a lot of detail there. We're optimistic that when you get to writing regulations, that's where you get who you want to consult with, what targets, what you are going to measure and what you are going to report on. Our expectation is that that comes in the regulatory process. We're good-faith people.

Mr. John Vanthof: You are aware that once it gets into the regulatory process, the public consultation part is kind of gone?

One more small point—it's not a small point. We fully agree that Local Food Week and Agriculture Week should not be at the same time. But do you think that the Local Food Act goes far enough on education? We've heard "home ec" so many times. I'm not that old, and I can remember home ec. What happened?

Mr. Lorne Small: I know that when you put an issue into the curriculum in the schools, it works. My children—I have five kids in school. They come home with that sort of stuff, and it does affect what you put in the grocery cart, so it works.

I have a concern. I sat on a school board for a period of time, and I have a little concern with continuing to put more and more stuff on the curriculum and forget what schools are for.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll move to the government side. Mr. Crack?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Mr. Small, for coming before us. From my opinion, and I think on the part of the government—I really appreciated your comments with aspirational over a regulatory approach, soft targets as opposed to hard targets. Trade disputes was a concern to you, and the flexibility in the different aspects of the public sector regarding spending and the costs involved.

But you made a comment concerning tax credits for farmers when they make donations to food banks. That's a very positive initiative, but from my perspective and our perspective, perhaps—do you have any ideas on how we could implement that based on the difference between rural food banks, smaller urban food banks, quality of product, value of product and how perhaps food banks and the government would be able to work with the CRA to come up with a solution to this potential initiative?

Mr. Lorne Small: Ideally, our organization would prefer that there was no such thing as food banks, that in fact they were not needed in a society, but they are. They're an institution. They're there.

I'm not a tax professional. I just think that many of our farm families would gladly donate produce to the local food banks. If there's a tax credit, they would welcome that. If there's not a tax credit, they'll still donate. I think it's one of those incentives to—every year, when you're filling out your return, it's a reminder that here's an opportunity that you could contribute to. So that's sort of our thinking: to donate to and help your fellow citizens from time to time. That's where our interest is in. The technicalities of it—I farm for a living; I can't be of much help there. Sorry.

Mr. Grant Crack: No, and that's perfectly fine. It's just that we find it a complicated issue to try to implement as well. I know that farmers do make substantial donations to food banks across the province, and we appreciate that and recognize that, so thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Good. Thank you, Mr. Small, for coming in. We appreciate your input.

Mr. Lorne Small: Thanks for having me.

GREATER TORONTO AREA AGRICULTURAL ACTION COMMITTEE

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): If we could move now to the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee. Welcome to the committee. You'll make a five-minute presentation, followed by three minutes each from each of the parties for questions. With a minute left, I'll give you a little tap as to "Your time has got one minute left." Would you please identify yourself for the purposes of Hansard?

Ms. Janet Horner: My name is Janet Horner. I'm the executive director of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Allan Thompson. I'm a regional councillor from the region of Peel, but I am vice-chair of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural

Action Committee and also sit on the Golden Horseshoe action committee.

Ms. Janet Horner: And we're both farmers.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you. Welcome.

Ms. Janet Horner: Thank you for the opportunity today to give you our ideas about what the Local Food Act should be and say to Ontario, both rural and urban. Our committee 18 months ago released something called the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan. It was a plan that, for the next 10 years, would help this food and farming cluster in the Golden Horseshoe attain some growth, and a lot of what's in the Local Food Act actually aligns with our action plan. So we think you're pretty smart people.

The first thing that we think needs to be in the Local Food Act would be a clarity of definition. We all know the morass we've walked into here with definitions all over the place. We feel that any definition should encompass food grown, produced, harvested, raised and processed in Ontario. I'm not sure how you'd wordsmith it, but we feel that the definition needs to incorporate all of those aspects, and we think that definition should be developed in tandem with CFIA and not out of step. That's our first point.

The second point talks about local food procurement. I've heard the questions you've had about this. We're not wanting a lot of civil servant jobs created to the enforcement of this thing. We do think there need to be targets, and we think that there could be a lot more time spent on helping the government of Ontario achieve those targets, but I cannot see a lot of time spent having to record every carrot that you buy, and so we've got to watch against that kind of saving nickels and spending dollars.

We encourage the province to adopt the system in provincial government ministries and helping and assisting municipalities, because not only will what you do affect your provincial ministries, but this will be a trickle-down effect to all of the municipalities across the province. They don't know how to do this, and I think we have an opportunity here to help them figure out how to do local food procurement, because it's big job to take on.

The next point I want to make is that we do support the promotion of food literacy in youth. The thing is, this act is not going to necessarily make that happen. There's got to be a meeting of the minds between the Ministers of Health, Education and Agriculture for this ever to go anywhere, and paying lip service to it in this act is not going to get the job done, and we all believe that needs to happen.

The provision of the tax credit for farmers—we agree.

The creation of a local food week separate from Ontario Agriculture Week—we agree. We also feel that you need to mobilize your communities and make sure that if there are local funds available to local communities, they will do a good job of promoting local food and their economies on the local basis.

We think there should be a local food soup day in conjunction with Local Food Week. What better way to get that word right out across the province and be a winner?

That's it, Mr. Chair. Allan is going to help me answer any questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll move to the NDP.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thanks for coming in. You're raising concerns about the counting in terms of targets, and I'm curious if you've thought about what kind of targets would be helpful that would support local food in Ontario.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Well, I'm going to go off track because I think you've heard it from everybody.

Under a lot of municipalities now, we have procurement programs that you have to buy whatever. So a lot of people are hooked up with Sysco or Gordon Food Service. Gordon Food Service is growing from, what, 18% to almost 25% of local food. They'll fill the demand if the ask is there. Sysco is doing the same.

The big thing is, there are a lot of avenues that we can work through to get there. I think it's education and awareness and your responsibility.

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Food security—I know it's misinterpreted as a lot of things. To me, I think food security is making sure that we're eating what we're consuming. From all the groups here, I think that message is pretty much loud and clear, and that's the area.

I think we all need to set targets. To me, legislated, real quick—we said no, and to me, it's a lazy way of incorporating something. Then it's done and you walk away and nothing gets done. I think as long as there are targets, everybody who has skin in the game has to deliver. I think you have to set a target low and build on that. There are a lot of small municipalities. I also sit on the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, and the big challenge is that a lot of municipalities do not even have the ability to incorporate that in their own procurements, and it's a challenge. I think we have to engage in different ways.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I think I'm not quite understanding. What kind of target would you support? No firm target? Would you recommend a target for a public institution or for a municipality?

Mr. Allan Thompson: Absolutely, and—

Ms. Janet Horner: Recommend.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Recommend—I would recommend that you start. The big thing is, some people say 10%, 25%, where you want to go. I think you have to do that to find your comfort zone, to know what you really have out there.

We've also done an asset mapping through the Golden Horseshoe. It's to bring all the groups—we've got processors, we've got everybody here, but the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing, and everybody's trying to protect their own little kingdoms. I think it's time we break down those silos and start sharing who is really out there.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We move to the government side: Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you both very much. There's a lot of positive that came out of your presentation. I really appreciated your comments about the regional aspect and the good work that's being done across the province on a regional basis. I want to talk about that, and I want to talk about other things.

You had mentioned, Allan—can I have your last name again, sir?

Mr. Allan Thompson: Thompson.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Mr. Thompson. You're on ROMA; is that correct?

Mr. Allan Thompson: Yes, I am.

Mr. Grant Crack: So you must be aware that AMO is not in favour of any legislated targets—

Mr. Allan Thompson: Yes.

Mr. Grant Crack:—when it comes to this particular piece of legislation, due to the cumbersome burden that it would place on municipalities, hospitals and other public sector—I don't know if you wanted to talk a little bit more about that. And then, if I have some more time, I want to talk about the food literacy component as well. Go ahead.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Sure, certainly. Real quick, what I'm going to say is that I do believe there need to be targets, but you know what? If you set it at 10%, then next year you've got to be better than that—you're going to be 10% better. I think we have to constantly keep building; if you're not, then you've got to answer why.

A big challenge is, leave that flexibility open. It's the same as an apple a day, but look what happened last year. Mother Nature showed that the apple industry wasn't going to happen in Ontario, and we all experienced that. I think that's the area that we have to do. I think we have to encourage everybody to do it, but say, "Look, this is what we're asking from you. We're not going to legislate it, but this is demanded of you."

Also, health is really caught onto this. I really think that if we incorporate everybody, especially with schools—we're trying to get breakfast in classrooms; that's a hard sell, but we're getting there.

I think there are a lot of avenues, and I think we have to be creative. That's why I'm saying if you legislate it, then you walk away and then nothing is done. This way, everybody's trying to achieve and learn from others on how we're doing it. Again, I think that's where the municipalities and AMO need to step up to the plate.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you. Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thirty seconds; time for a short one.

Mr. Grant Crack: Oh, great. Food literacy: I think you respect the fact that in this particular bill there's no mandate from the ministry and from the Minister of Agriculture and Food to make curriculum changes, but that's something, perhaps, that we could look at. I think most of us are supportive of looking at trying to promote food literacy in our schools.

I don't know if you have one second or 10 seconds. You want to talk about that?

Ms. Janet Horner: I think there needs to be a meeting of three ministers first.

Mr. Grant Crack: Okay.

Ms. Janet Horner: I was in a meeting with Deb Matthews one day, and she said she'd be willing to convene that meeting. We haven't seen that happen yet. I think the ministers have to figure out how they're going to be involved in the Local Food Act and how they can do something about local food literacy, and I think it will be up to them.

Mr. Grant Crack: And the three ministers are?

Ms. Janet Horner: Well, the Premier, Liz Sandals and Deb Matthews, yes.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you. I just wanted that on the record.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much, Ms. Horner and Mr. Thompson. Thank you for coming in.

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Oh, I guess we're going to have a question or two from—what is it?—the Progressive Conservative Party.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. I was listening to your presentation and particularly liked increasing the definition of just "Ontario" to actually describe what "Ontario" means. Whether it's grown in Ontario, whether it's processed in Ontario or whether we just delivered to Ontario yesterday, it's a product of Ontario—

Ms. Janet Horner: Or whether we create those jobs in Ontario by processing it.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: So I think that's worth looking at as an amendment.

I'm more interested, though, in the targets. I know everybody is suggesting that that's going to be problematic because it's going to put too much pressure on the buyers and so forth.

I just want to relate this, because our former Speaker is sitting here, and he was the Speaker at the time when this happened. But I went into the lounge upstairs, and obviously this place is provided by one of the food suppliers here in this Legislature. We went into the lounge and there were apples, and the apples had a little sticker on them that said "Product of Washington." It wasn't Washington in Oxford county. We actually did contact the Speaker of the day and he checked into it. After that time, the same supplier never supplied us with Washington apples anymore, because we wanted Ontario. That's how simple it was to buy local. I just wondered if we couldn't all get our minds around how you do that in wholesale.

Ms. Janet Horner: And, you know, sometimes it's not rocket science.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Hear, hear.

Ms. Janet Horner: I was a caterer for 30 years in my other life, and when I said to my supplier, "Do not bring me lettuce from California when Ontario lettuce is

available,” he never would, or I would sent it back. So we’ve got to just take the practical approach here.

If we look, we can probably say, “Oh, yeah. Most institutions are probably, even with eggs and milk and their basics, running in around the 18% as local already.” So if we can build on that and build on those numbers and say, “Okay, how be we aspire to...,” this is where we want to be. Let’s see where the spirit of this thing can go without bringing down the heavy hammer of the law.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. Now our time is up. I appreciate very much your coming in and sharing your views with us.

Ms. Janet Horner: Thank you.

ORGANIC COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): If we could move now to the Organic Council of Ontario. Welcome to the committee. You have five minutes for presentation. With a minute to go, I’ll give you a little tap, followed by three minutes of questioning from each of the parties. Would you identify yourself for the purpose of Hansard, please.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: My name is Jodi Koberinski. I’m with the Organic Council of Ontario, and I will forward my talk for you folks to see by email.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: The Local Food Act represents an enormous opportunity to shape the future of food for Ontarians. The Organic Council, on behalf of our members in the organic sector, wants to start with thanking the Wynne government and the preceding government for initiating this act and getting the ball rolling.

We want to state unequivocally that we wish to see this act passed. We are not willing to give up, in the pursuit of the perfect—to miss out on the good in the meantime. So even though we have a number of things that we’ll bring to your attention that we think are missing in the act, we really hope that this Legislature will pass the act and we can build from there.

It’s a very simple act. It has three points. The first one: “To foster successful and resilient local food economies and systems throughout Ontario.”

Then it goes into a great deal of detail on definitions, and we get a definition for a hospital, but we don’t get a definition of “successful” or “resilient.” We think this is a huge oversight. I know, from the work that we do with our colleagues across the scale of agriculture, from permaculture all the way through to the largest industrialists, they will all answer what “resilient” looks like differently and what “success” is differently. So if we don’t take this on, we’re in a real hard time here.

For example, is it successful if we have more yield per acre but less nutrition per acre? Is it success if we don’t have the water and seed resources in a decade to produce food because we gave it up for profit today? So we really need to look at what we mean by “success” and “resilience.” I’m hoping that when we—you know, at the very basic level, success for the farming community is profitability, not productivity. Success may look like less

food dollars 30 years down the road because we have a shorter value chain because people are eating more direct from the farm and they are not going through a grocery store, but they’re getting maybe 30% or 40% of their food direct from a farmers’ market or a CSA. So we have to really be clear what it is that we mean by “success”—pointing back to what Janet said, this idea of our three ministries, education, health and agriculture, getting together and needing to discuss what it is that a successful local food system looks like down the road.

Local food is about a desire to connect with people; it is not simply a postal code. So I’m hoping that this act is something that can become aspirational. We have very immediate short-term, real targets that we’ll have to address, but there’s some medium- and long-term shaping of the food system that we could do through this act. I’m encouraging you as politicians to keep your eye on the long haul. This act will be in place for a long time, and I hope that we don’t end up putting something in place that addresses the needs of the immediate from the production side and gives up what’s good for the province over the long haul.

1710

I’d also like to request that we add some language in the preamble that recognizes that “local” is proxy for a lot of other values. In 2010, some research was done at Vineland, looking at the branding for “local,” “organic,” and “natural.” Sixteen per cent of the respondents thought local food meant GMO-free. Clearly, there’s a lot of deep misconception about what local food is. I think if we don’t acknowledge in the act that “local” means a lot of different things to a lot of people, we hamstring ourselves to a postal code over the long haul or to greenwashing by assuming that local automatically means that food is produced in a more sustainable fashion. We’re going to have to tackle some of these tough questions through the regulation and how we work with the organizations involved.

At the end of the day, we really support what’s been said around the table. Education is the key. I’m noticing around the table that there are some folks my age. Recycling programs didn’t happen because we legislated recycling and then we waited till people were grown up and asked them to recycle. We went after students when they were in grade 5 and grade 6, and we introduced blue box programs.

We need to take the same approach to local food. If we are not teaching young children about food systems, we’re not looking at reports that this government has put out in 2006 and 2009 asking for a deeper connection between food and education, whether that’s school garden programs or it’s working back in home economics, we are really going to miss the boat in doing the third purpose of this act, which is creating our new market for local food, and that should be every Ontarian who understands the value of the food system.

I’m open to questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We’ll move to the government side: Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: That was a lot of information.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: I can talk quickly.

Mr. Grant Crack: You did a great job. Thank you very much. The Organic Council of Ontario: Maybe you can just tell us a little bit more about that, and how does it fall in line with how you want to promote the local food—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Sure. We're a full-value-chain organization. We represent everybody in the system, from producer all the way through to eater, so we really already deeply understand how a value chain works and how to represent consumer value from production all the way through to the other side.

We are really keen to see that resilience here includes environmental sustainability. So we recognize that attaching targets for how food is produced is light years ahead of where our system is at. Our engagement in this particular conversation is about creating space for defining "local" in a way that moves us along that sustainability continuum, but we don't have any illusions that we'll introduce targets that also attach an environmental goal to procurement at this point. We are hopeful, though, that down the road, when we're looking at the economic and health benefits that come from organic production, any targets we set for local will also include targets in the future for local organic and really making use of that Foodland Ontario organic designation. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Grant Crack: It sure does. It was perfect. I really appreciate what you're saying about the aspirational component of this and setting us up for the long term, not just to deal with some short-term initiatives—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: I was just expressing to some colleagues outside how much I do appreciate these opportunities for these conversations, because if I'm talking about next quarter, everybody behind me—I'm on one extreme end of the conversation, but when we're out in the hall discussing what's going on in here, we are all very much on the same page. Whether it's Alison from pork or it's us from the organic sector, we really want to see a sustaining food production system over the long term.

Mr. Grant Crack: Okay. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Good. Thank you very much. We'll move to the official opposition.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. I appreciate the fact that you agree, as almost everybody presenting today has said, that we need something to aspire to.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Absolutely.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I totally agree with that. I just want to take a little different path. We've heard some debate about "local" and "local" being all Ontario and whether we should define that more. I wonder if you could tell me what it is we're trying to sell. Like, what does it mean? Why should the consumer walking on University Avenue be interested in buying local?

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: This is actually—I went deeper into this in my presentation. People choose local food

because they're rejecting the industrialization of the food system on some level. They're recognizing they no longer have a relationship with their food. Maybe they have been sick and recognize that what they put in their bodies really matters, or once they enter into the local food system and they begin to develop that relationship with a farmer at the farmers' market or with a brand on the shelf, like Organic Meadow—110 farm families, 50 cows at a time—they can really relate on that sort of personal level.

In the work that I've done over 20 years in this space, what I've really noticed is that when people are moving toward local food, they're looking for a different kind of relationship with their food than simply as a consumer. There's a recognition that what we had pursued out of the 1950s, which was a good agenda—let's not starve—created uniformity, predictability and convenience, but that those things alone are not going to satisfy what it is we really get out of food. So we think that local food is sort of the gateway drug to a more connected niche within the community itself. It opens up people's eyes to their relationship to their community. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: So the definition of "all of Ontario" wouldn't accomplish that?

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Where we run into issues is things get complicated. If I make a pasta, I might be able to get a local wheat, but I can't get sunflower oil. I might have to get that over the border. So does my product end up not being local?

I really appreciate Sustain Ontario's contribution to this, that we really need to think about local being regional, because sometimes "local" is across the border in Quebec, if you're in Cornwall, or sometimes it's south of the border, if you're in Windsor; right? How we get to what people are looking for in local—they're looking for a relationship with their food and they're looking for food that's produced in what they believe is a more sustaining fashion.

That's why I made the reference to the idea of proxy, because people assume that just by food not travelling, it's environmentally better. They are also assuming that their farmers are using a more respectful practice than what they've seen in the Food, Inc. videos. Clearly, in Ontario, across the board, our farmers are practising some of the cleanest agriculture. Whether they're organic or not, we want to really celebrate that, but that—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: We need to get at that what's behind local is the relationship, not the location.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. If we could move to the third party.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thanks, Jodi. Thanks for coming in. I'm just trying to understand. I'm getting a sense that you're concerned about something happening here in terms of short-sightedness. Is there anything that's been presented that you see as being short-sighted so far?

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: That we could do in the short term?

Mr. Jonah Schein: No. Is there something short-sighted—like you came in by saying you want to pass the bill—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: I want to make sure that we have an aspirational bill here. I think the resistance to setting targets or—if we just look at the act inside of the food system we have as it operates today as opposed to the kind of food system we want down the road, we're going to end up setting targets that are probably not aggressive enough. We're going to not be—

Mr. Jonah Schein: Could you not be aspirational and have targets?

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Well, I think that you can. That's what I'm saying. We don't want to give up the aspirational side for the pursuit of the short term. I think targets are absolutely necessary. We didn't get emissions changes in California without setting targets. We're not going to get local food without setting targets. I believe that they should be incremental and that we should set aggressive targets in the 10- or 15-year term so that people can start planning into that, as opposed to constantly being in a situation where we say, "We can't find enough supply." The supply will build if they know it's coming. We were able to plan building cars with lower emissions because we set hard targets that were down the road.

Mr. Jonah Schein: In terms of paths to marketplace to support small organic farmers, you mentioned farmers' markets. Are there other things that we should be looking at in terms of—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Absolutely. I mean, why every hospital doesn't belong to a community-shared agriculture program or why we aren't working with some of the food hub models that are starting to come up in the institutions is a real surprise to me. I think there are lots of opportunities to work with farmers in the local community, whether it's at the school level or at the hospital level in particular.

Does that answer your question? Great.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Good.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Thanks so much, everyone.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much for coming in and sharing your opinion.

ALLIANCE OF ONTARIO FOOD PROCESSERS

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We'll move now to the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors. We welcome back to the Legislature former Speaker and member Mr. Peters.

Mr. Steve Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): I know that you remember the day when you ejected me from the House, and I want you to know I hold no hard feelings about that today.

Mr. Steve Peters: Thank you. I trust that these interjections are not going to cut into my time there, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): You will be getting your full five minutes; I can assure you of that. Welcome.

Mr. Steve Peters: It's a pleasure to be back and it's a real pleasure to be sitting on the other side of the table. My name is Steve Peters, executive director of the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors. We represent about 650 food and beverage manufacturers in the province. The province is home to 3,000 companies. We are the third-largest food cluster in North America, so the food processing industry—as much as we may think the economy of Ontario drives on four wheels, we are the industry that is the engine of the economy of this province. Also, we're the important link from the farm gate to your plate. We play a very important role.

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Some of the comments that I would make regarding the purposes of the act—knowing where your food comes from: There seems to be a lot of discussion around the table about education, and that's great. I would dare not bring a prop into the Legislature, but I would encourage you to go read a label on a product over there. When we talk about education, I think one of the things we need to be looking at is education as to how to read a label. I would challenge anyone in this room: How many people could read this label? How many people might think that because this is Canada Choice, they're drinking 100% apple juice produced here in Ontario? I think part of the education needs to be an understanding of labels, an understanding of our whole food safety system. Educate the public on the great things we do here in this province and putting our system up against any other in the world.

We need to educate as well and make people understand what GMO versus non-GMO is. What is organic? What is hormone-free? A lot of things that people don't know—they think they know—to me, that's part of education, not just teaching someone how to cook. I'll always remember Miss Edgar, my home ec teacher, and what she did.

As well, when you talk about market development, one of the things we need to be conscious of is adding value, that it's not just about fresh product getting into our facilities. We need to look at how we can get more processed product into our facilities as well.

If you want to support new processors, it's not just all about money, that there are going to be funds available from the Local Food Act and Growing Forward 2. A new processor is going to need navigational tools. If somebody's going to get into a business of becoming a food processor because they can grow a great cucumber—we don't have a large cucumber processor left in this province. If you had a farmer who was growing cucumbers and his wife makes the ideal dill pickle at home, how do we educate that person to bring that product from the farmer's field to a processed product, to make it available? We need to make sure that we have the navigational tools as well.

On the question of definition of local food, one of the things we need to be conscious of, and I think the

committee needs to be conscious of, is that a lot of the food processors in our province can't source everything right here in the province of Ontario. We make some wonderful baked products. A lot of that good hard wheat is coming from western Canada, but it's supporting a small local bakery here in Ontario. Is that local?

One of my favourites: Ontario craft beer. In Ontario craft beer, we've got some amazing breweries around the province. We have very few hop producers here in the province of Ontario. The majority of the hops are coming from Washington state. Many of the barleys that are going to be used in those products are coming from western Canada. To me, the Railway City brewery in St. Thomas is a local product, producing a great local beer, but not all the hops, as I say, are going to be consumed locally. I think that's something that you need to think about in the definition as well.

The question of goals and targets: You know, I look at the Ontario food processing industry. We add value to 65% of everything that is grown or produced in the province of Ontario. It used to be 70%. To me, there's an opportunity. If we're adding value to 65%, how do we get to 70%, 75%? Because the best safety net for a farmer in this province isn't a cheque from the government of Ontario; it is having a good market to sell his or her product in.

New exports, import displacement: One of the challenges we've got in Ontario right now, and in Canada as a whole, is imported food products. We've gone from a trade deficit of \$1 billion a year to over \$5 billion a year. How do we start to displace that? The FreshCo I visited last night in Brampton is entirely different than the FreshCo that I would visit in St. Thomas. How do we take advantage of that changing face of Ontario? Again, I think we could set targets for import displacement, to look at new exports. You can do it. We did it here at the Legislature. We said, voluntarily—and Mr. Hardeman made reference to the apple issue. We were able to get to where almost 75% of everything that was sold or is sold downstairs and within this legislative dining room is an Ontario product.

Local Food Week: I'll leave that one for you to debate. Perhaps if nothing else, maybe you might want to look at a local food month.

The tax break for donations: We support this. Right now, I think you should perhaps look at getting it right with fruits and vegetables, but one of the things you should be looking at is, if you can get it right there, then start to look at food processors. Food processors are great supporters of food banks all around Ontario, but it's voluntary. Are there some incentives that we could put in place to help a food processor give more to support the local food banks through tax credits? Again, as I say, they're supportive of the industry already, and we'll watch with interest as that one moves forward, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We appreciate your comments.

We'll move to the official opposition: Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for being here and making your presentation this afternoon.

I want to go to the last one at the end. I think that's the first presenter of all the presenters we've had that deals with the processing industry as it relates to the whole issue of the Local Food Act and the involvement with it. It's one thing to talk about horticulture coming in and the fresh produce, but local food could be much more than that in the processing industry. Could you just quickly tell me what part the food processing industry could play in what we're talking about here as local?

Mr. Steve Peters: Well, I think a lot of your food service providers now—not every hospital in this day and age is preparing their food in the kitchens like they used to. They're outsourcing to a co-packer or someone that's in that food service industry that is preparing a lot of that product in advance. It could be the ground beef patties and the mashed potatoes that are being served, and those maybe are being prepared off-site. There would be that opportunity for the food and beverage sector to not just—again, I don't think that this Local Food Act should just focus in on fresh product; there are ways to add value. If a local hospital is looking at a source to procure its product, then it could be a company—Marsan Foods here in Toronto as an example—that produces a lot of pre-prepared foods. I think there are opportunities to involve the processing sector going forward.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: But in that one, if I could just go one step further, would it be possible or practical for processors—you represent a whole group of processors—if you were going to tender a request for proposal to supply that food that we're talking about, to actually include what percentage of it you wanted to be Ontario product?

Mr. Steve Peters: Very much so. I think we demonstrated that we could do it with our food service provider here at the Legislature. I know of restaurants that are out there right now that wanted to serve local, but one of the challenges they have is procuring their product. Their chef spends more time out trying to source the garlic, tomatoes, peppers and the chicken and meat and not spending that time in the kitchen. You could create almost a shopping list of product that could be available, again helping on food education, to help the food service industry or the restaurant industry, to guide them as to where to go to source the product they need to serve local.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll move to the third party.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thanks very much for coming, Steve. You've brought, I'd say, a unique perspective. As a lifelong dairy farmer, production is just one part of the chain. Often if you don't have the other parts of the chain, the production will never get to the consumer. Also with your goal, there's got to be a way that we can set something more than an aspiration—a target or a starting line. This act doesn't really even have a starting

line. That's what I think we're all looking for. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Steve Peters: Well, what I would say with the act is that I think the goal is lofty, but at the same time you've got to—and this may go back to education—make that decision as a consumer, that either as a consumer or as a provider of product we are going to do everything we can to secure local product.

Again, I will come back to this Legislature. When we said to our food service provider, "We recognize that we're a trading country and we need coffee and we need orange juice, but we want Ontario apples in here. We want you, in your menu development downstairs, to find ways to procure that product locally," I can't answer the question: Did that cost us more? But it was voluntarily done by us saying, "Look, this building is a showcase to the province of Ontario. We want to showcase Ontario product," and our food service provider did that.

I think there would be opportunities to find ways to work with our hospitals and our various institutions. Sometimes they just don't know—again to my comment about the restaurant, sometimes they don't know where to go. To me, I come back to education. Education is not just teaching somebody how to cook the food, but where do you go to find it?

Mr. John Vanthof: One more nuts-and-bolts issue regarding the amendment to provide a tax credit to farmers, which we agree with. I'm looking again at dairy. I provided milk to the food bank, but it only worked if the processor also provided the processing. In a case like that, a long-term goal would be some kind of tax regime for the processor as well, if it's partnering with the farmer?

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Mr. Steve Peters: I think there could be. I think there could be opportunities. We'll use apples. Perhaps there's an opportunity to work with an apple juice processor: You know what? We're going to send in some additional apples. The farmer gets credit for those apples. The processor then could get credit for the apple juice that is created from that product.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Good. Thank you very much. Government? Mr. Balkissoon?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Steve, welcome back. Good to see you here. As you discussed the definition—and many of the others did too—you said that somewhere down the road we have to add processing. You kind of created a question in my mind. A lot of the processing is not 100% local; they have to bring some stuff from outside. But the act, the way it's written right now, is targeting the local stuff. Are you saying that right now we should look beyond that? To me, that's phase 2 and phase 3, where we look at the processors later on, unless we can clarify right now it's local food grown and processed and it has to be 100%, because the goal is to start here and later on we'll try and improve it.

The second question I have for you, and you can answer it, is the targets and whatever—definitely we can

deal with those targets or goals in regulation. Would you agree with me?

Mr. Steve Peters: I think, yes, you could deal with them in regulation, but I do think you do need to say that if we're adding 65% value, we've got to set that goal to get us to 70%.

To your first question: I'll use a samosa. We can create some amazing samosas in the province of Ontario. We could use Ontario flour, Ontario vegetables, Ontario meat, but all those spices that are required to make that amazing samosa we cannot source here in the province of Ontario. I don't know. I still think that's a pretty local product, but those spices didn't come from Ontario, so does that rule out that being local food?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm not saying it rules it out, but it would belong in a separate category.

Mr. Steve Peters: I'll leave that one for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to figure out.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'll go back to the regulation. This is the act and the act would set the framework. To me, when we create the regulations, we can go out to the industry and say how much percentage of apples it is today and then set the goal where we want to be in two years or five years or six years.

Mr. Steve Peters: I would say that as long as you're developing those regulations you are consulting on the regulations and they're not just going to be developed internally and dealt with by the legs and regs committee and then suddenly become law. This is an opportunity—if you're going to bring in regulation, this would require a great deal of consultation with industry.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: And I don't disagree with you because I think that's the intent. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We appreciate you coming in, Steve. Good to see you again.

Mr. Steve Peters: Thank you. The Alliance of Ontario Food Processors is hosting a reception next Monday here at the Legislature. I hope you can join us.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): It's on my calendar.

DIETITIANS OF CANADA

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): I'd now like to welcome the Dietitians of Canada. Thank you very much for coming in. We have five minutes for your presentation, followed by three minutes of questioning. At a minute to go, I'll give you a little tap on the counter. Would you please identify yourself for the purpose of Hansard.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Great. Good afternoon. I'm Leslie Whittington-Carter and I'm the government relations coordinator with Dietitians of Canada. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the proposed Local Food Act.

Dietitians of Canada is a professional association for registered dietitians across the country and we have about 3,000 members here in Ontario. Our vision is to advance health through food and nutrition, so our recommenda-

tions around strengthening the Local Food Act are built on its ability to support Ontarians' health.

First recommendation: We would like to propose adding another purpose to the bill to complement the economic-awareness-raising purposes that are already in place, and that is to support healthy eating through increased food literacy and food skills, as well as access to local foods. I know you've heard a lot about food literacy and I'm going to talk a little bit more about that again. By articulating that additional purpose, you really get a potential for stronger impact on health.

To enable an added purpose of food literacy and food skills, we recommend that the Local Food Act be used to direct the Ministry of Education to work toward incorporating an evidence-informed food literacy and food skills component in mandated curriculum for K to 12. That would include things like food access, food selection, nutrition education, food preparation, cooking, budgeting.

You heard from other presenters last weekend that food can be woven across many strands of the curriculum, and we certainly agree with that. There are certainly nutrition lessons incorporated currently, but there is a lack of food literacy and food skills. Providing opportunities for all Ontario children to develop these fundamental skills through the education system will support healthy eating, and it will also contribute to the increased use of local Ontario food products.

Right now, we're in the midst of a pilot project, in collaboration with OMAFRA and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, to run a pilot for a healthy fundraising program called Fresh from the Farm. The numbers are still preliminary, but right now we've got, I believe, over 110,000 pounds of Ontario fruits and vegetables going to Ontario families through this healthy fundraising program. That's an example of how various organizations can work together to contribute to advancement of local foods.

Dietitians of Canada also supports food literacy and food skills through our Nutrition Month campaign held every year in March. In 2010, Nutrition Month focused on local foods, asking Canadians to celebrate food from field to table. Last year, consumers were guided through selecting food, making their decisions at the grocery store. This coming March, we're going to continue the food skills emphasis by talking about cooking and enjoying healthy foods together. These Nutrition Month campaigns have tremendous reach across the province and the country, and we can strengthen children's exposure to this messaging through mandated food literacy and food skills curriculum to bring about even more positive results.

Our second recommendation is to support inclusion of goals and targets for local food procurement in public sector organizations, as long as those targets are set with involvement of stakeholders and with supports to make them attainable. I'll build on some of what the previous speaker mentioned; Steve Peters was talking about processors. We also note the need for adequate process-

ing capacity for local foods to enable public sector organizations to integrate foods effectively with limited staff to prepare them from the raw state. For example, the Norfolk county Local Foods to Health Care Facilities Initiative reported some challenges for the Ontario food processors to meet the needs of the broader public sector organizations. We recognize that there is a need for some incentives and supports along there.

The final point I'll make is that I'd like to see the Local Food Act be used as a starting point for adoption of a broader food and nutrition strategy, which I believe you've also heard about from some other speakers, and which has the potential to result in health, economic and environmental gains for Ontario.

I'd be happy to answer any questions on any of those recommendations.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll start with the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thanks for coming in. I agree with many of the points that you raised.

I'm wondering if you've heard of a study called The Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket that a public health unit has put out.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Definitely.

Mr. Jonah Schein: For folks around the committee table, it says how much it costs for a person, by age and by sex, to eat based on the Canada Food Guide.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Essentially, yes.

Mr. Jonah Schein: You know that it's pretty much impossible for low-income people in this province, people who are on social assistance programs, to ever come close to eating—

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: The scenarios that are depicted using the Nutritious Food Basket do show that there's a shortfall, I believe, for every category—definitely for families and for single-parent households, there's a huge shortfall in terms of being able to purchase a healthy diet, as indicated through the Nutritious Food Basket.

Mr. Jonah Schein: There seems to be a tremendous reluctance by this government to ever actually address income security programs in Ontario. Would you suggest that maybe to get access to healthy food, that we actually deliver this through our school programs, that we actually put food in schools for students? Would that start to address some of these issues?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: I think food in schools is certainly one aspect of it. Our advocacy around the Nutritious Food Basket and poverty reduction has certainly been using the—we recommend using the Nutritious Food Basket data as a starting point for developing the social assistance rates and other methods of determining the supports that are needed for people to be able to attain a healthy diet.

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Mr. Jonah Schein: And one path along the way would be making sure that there are student nutrition programs—

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Student nutrition programs are an excellent example of where you can build in both education and actual food provision.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much. We'll move to the government. Mr. Crack.

Mr. Grant Crack: A couple of things: Welcome and thank you very much. Maybe you could just elaborate on the goals and targets that you set out. You appear to be okay with the goals and targets set with stakeholders. Would those be legislated targets, or is your opinion to have aspirational targets, where we can continue to strive to reach those in the event special circumstances prevent us from reaching them in a particular year?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: I think that the main point with anything that is legislated would then be, what is the enforcement and recourse if those targets or goals are not met? I think that again would require some very strong consultation to find out what is practical. I also think that any goals and targets need to be based on some sort of evidence. Some of the other speakers have alluded to what's happening now. We need to find out—anything from 15% to 30% are some of the numbers being used. But I definitely recommend that whatever is set as a target would be based in knowing what our starting point is.

Mr. Grant Crack: Okay. Thank you. Maybe you could just explain the position of the dietitians on the National Food Strategy. You have a minute, maybe. Are there any comments on that, on how it relates?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: We definitely believe that there is a need for a food strategy. Here in Ontario, we have been very involved with development of an Ontario food and nutrition strategy, so we would like to see, obviously, linkages between any national work and provincial work. But the work that has been done to date on an Ontario food and nutrition strategy has been the result of great collaboration between a whole host of parties from agriculture, processing, farmers and the health sector. A great deal of work has been done, and now the need is to take some of that to the next step by having that cross-ministerial and inter-sectoral approach to developing a healthy food strategy for the province.

Interruption.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We apologize for the distraction. The food is so plentiful it rolls across the floor.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: I hope that was a local cookie that went across.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): If we could move to the Progressive Conservatives for questioning.

Interjections.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I won't go there, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for your presentation. I think you are the last presentation we are going to have on the Local Food Act. I think it has been almost universal, that we've had a discussion from almost every presenter

about the issue of targets and setting something to aspire to, and I think you came to that.

I did this with one other one, too; I'm going to be a little different on this one. Representing the dietitians, you talked a lot about the quality of the food and how important it was that everybody gets the right kind of foods. Why is it that that is connected to the Local Food Act? I don't see anything in the Local Food Act that tells me that there's any difference between the food that we're talking about grown in Ontario and the food grown anywhere else in the world. How do we square the circle with the fact that we're talking about local food, and the diet part of it is important in your presentation?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Well, I think one of the most obvious intersections is around the use of local Ontario fruits and vegetables. Obviously the more fruits and vegetables you eat, it's a pretty good indicator of having a better overall, healthier diet. Certainly, there's other—meat products are also healthy choices, and there's tons of other examples of Ontario foods that are also part of a healthy diet. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question, exactly.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I think you're getting there. Yes, I think it is. But your explanation would suggest that we could call this bill the wholesome food act, and it would do the same thing. Is that right? From your presentation, we're talking about the quality of the food as opposed to where it's grown or where it's produced.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: I think we're also concerned with the economic and environmental benefits of local foods as opposed to merely the very important nutritional values as well. Certainly, that's where the local food does—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Well, I want to thank you, as the last presenter. We finally got an answer that says why it is that we have this Local Food Act. Thank you.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Well, thank you very much for your time. I'm glad I could be the last one to wrap it up.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Thank you very much for coming in. We appreciate your views.

If there's no further business to bring before the—

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): We have some business?

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to move a motion. I move that the Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy write to the House leaders on behalf of the committee, requesting that the committee be allowed to travel from place to place and meet at the call of the Chair during intersessions—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): I'm sorry. The committee is meeting today on Bill 36. Under the programming motion, that was the only thing we can discuss today.

Mr. John Vanthof: With your indulgence, Chair, could I just table it and read it into the record?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): No. You can table it.

Mr. John Vanthof: Then I'd like to table it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): You can table it.

Mr. John Vanthof: And read it into the record?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): No. You can table it. You can't read it into the record.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): I would if I could, but I can't.

Mr. Grant Crack: Chair, can we take a five-minute recess prior to that motion coming forward?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): No. I overruled him. There's nothing to recess for.

I remind the committee that there's clause-by-clause on Bill 36 on Tuesday, October 29, at 4 p.m., or following orders of the day. Thank you all very much. The committee stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1746.

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