

October 20, 2017

Ms. Kimberley Kitteringham  
City Clerk  
City of Markham  
101 Town Centre Boulevard  
Markham, ON L3R 9W3

Dear Ms. Kitteringham:

**Re: York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

Regional Council, at its meeting held on October 19, 2017, adopted the following recommendations of Committee of the Whole regarding "York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy":

1. Council receive the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy prepared by Synthesis Agrifood Network and vetted by the York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group.

2. Council endorse the five strategic goals:

**Goal 1:** Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector

**Goal 2:** Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development

**Goal 3:** Support increased capacity for value added processing and support services

**Goal 4:** Leverage the Region's location within the Greater Toronto Area through direct farm marketing to meet demand for local food production

**Goal 5:** Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region

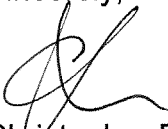
3. That consideration of a full-time Agri-food Specialist position be referred to the 2018 Budget deliberations.

4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report and the attached strategy to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and the Clerks of local municipalities.

A copy of Clause 6 of Committee of the Whole Report No. 14 is enclosed for your information.

Please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503 if you have any questions with respect to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CR', written over the printed name.

Christopher Raynor  
Regional Clerk

/S. Dumont  
Attachments

Clause 6 in Report No. 14 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on October 19, 2017.

## **6**

### **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

Committee of the Whole recommends:

1. Receipt of the presentation by Jonathan Wheatle, Manager, Strategic Economic Initiatives and Bronwynne Wilton, Wilton Consulting Group.
2. Receipt of the deputation by Kim Empringham, Chair, York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group; Secretary/Treasurer/Director, York Region Federation of Agriculture.
3. Adoption of the following recommendations, *as amended*, contained in the report dated September 29, 2017 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:
  1. Council receive the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy prepared by Synthesis Agrifood Network and vetted by the York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group.
  2. Council endorse the five strategic goals:

**Goal 1:** Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector

**Goal 2:** Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development

**Goal 3:** Support increased capacity for value added processing and support services

**Goal 4:** Leverage the Region's location within the Greater Toronto Area through direct farm marketing to meet demand for local food production

**Goal 5:** Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region
  3. *That consideration of a full-time Agri-food Specialist position be referred to the 2018 Budget deliberations.*

## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report and the attached strategy to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and the Clerks of local municipalities.

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Report dated September 29, 2017 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner now follows:

### **1. Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

1. Council receive the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy prepared by Synthesis Agrifood Network and vetted by the York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group.

2. Council endorse the five strategic goals:

**Goal 1:** Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector

**Goal 2:** Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development

**Goal 3:** Support increased capacity for value added processing and support services

**Goal 4:** Leverage the Region's location within the Greater Toronto Area through direct farm marketing to meet demand for local food production

**Goal 5:** Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region

3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report and the attached strategy to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and the Clerks of local municipalities.

### **2. Purpose**

This report provides an overview of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy developed in collaboration with the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and York Region Food Network.

### **3. Background and Previous Council Direction**

**The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group was established in 2001 to provide advice on the protection and promotion of agriculture and farming in the Region**

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is a volunteer advisory committee that was created by Regional Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. The group is similar to agricultural advisory committees that have been established in the Regions of Halton, Peel and Durham. It is currently made up of seven members representing:

- Holland Marsh Growers Association
- York Federation of Agriculture
- York Farm Fresh Association
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
- Markham and East York Agricultural Society
- York Region Food Network
- The Regional Municipality of York

**The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group requested additional support for Agricultural and Agri-Food initiatives**

Currently, two York Region Planning and Economic Development staff provide administrative and procedural support to the Liaison Group and work collaboratively on developing and implementing the annual work plan.

On [April 14, 2016](#) Committee of the Whole received a report updating the activities of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group throughout 2015 and planned initiatives for 2016. During this meeting the York Region

## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group made a deputation presentation requesting that the Region dedicate staff and budget to support agricultural initiatives.

### **Council approved the development of a York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy to guide future program development**

In support of the April 14 request for additional resources, on [November 17, 2016](#) Council supported the development of a York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy to inform future policy development, initiatives and resource allocation decisions.

The objectives of the strategy are:

- Support York Region's agricultural and food production sectors
- Gain an understanding of the economic impact of the agriculture sector in York Region
- Identify agricultural and Agri-food sub-sectors with the greatest potential for creating and sustaining employment and investment in the agricultural industry in York Region
- Identify possible policy and process changes to support agriculture and agri-food in York Region
- Identify gaps, key areas and recommend actions for York Region to make an impact in supporting the growth of the agriculture and agri-food sector

A consulting company, Synthesis Agri-food Network, was retained in December, 2016 to help develop the strategy. The intent of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy is to articulate a comprehensive set of goals and help guide York Region's efforts to support the agriculture industry.

## **4. Analysis and Implications**

### **Review and analysis of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food sector involved consultation with industry stakeholders**

Direct stakeholder input was gathered by reviewing 140 responses to an online survey, 15 interviews and two open houses with a total of 30 participants.

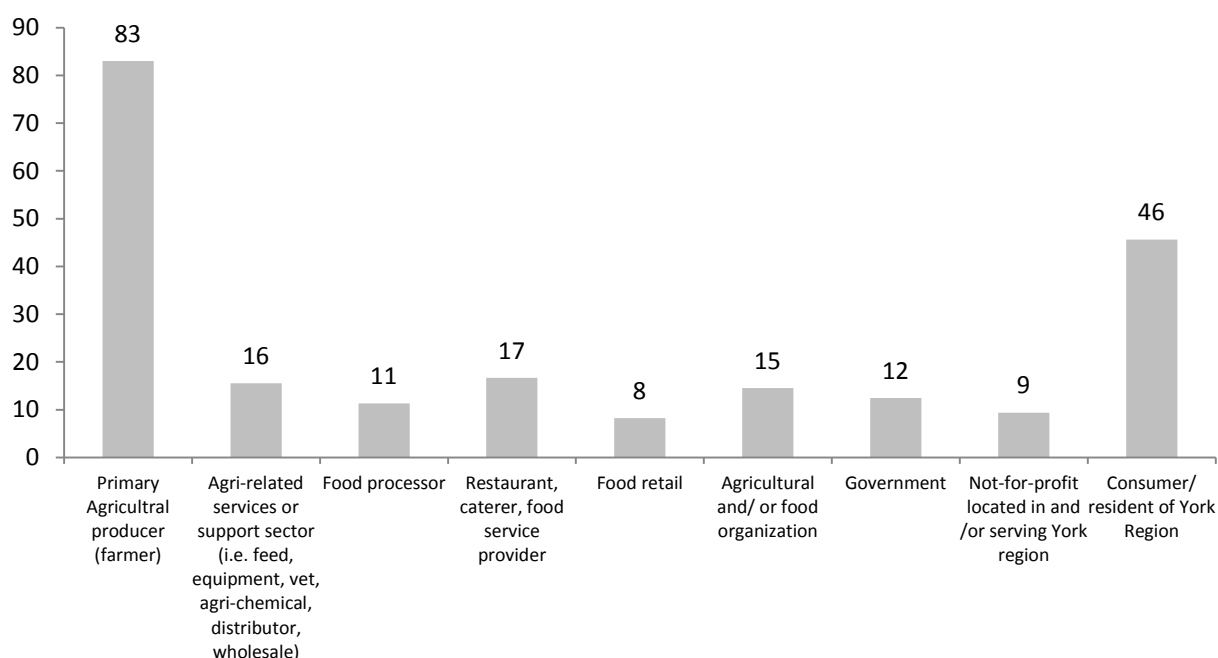
The survey participants were from across York Region with the majority being from Georgina (23 per cent), East Gwillimbury (17 per cent) Whitchurch-Stouffville (16 per cent) and King (12 per cent).

More than 59 per cent of the survey respondents were primary food producers, 32 per cent consumers, 11.9 per cent restaurant and food related businesses,

## York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy

8.1 per cent food processors. The detailed breakdown is shown in Figure 1. A number of participants identified themselves in multiple areas.

**Figure 1**  
**Breakdown of Survey Respondents**



The review also included an analysis of multiple documents including: 2011 and 2016 Agriculture Census, Provincial plans, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance 2015 asset study, Vision 2051, York Region Official Plan – 2010, Economic Development Action Plan and Farmfresh Market Study.

### **The strategy document outlines some key findings and trends provincially and regionally**

The strategy positions York Region within the Provincial and Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). It compares the performance of the agri-food sector in York Region relative to the Province and the GTHA while highlighting challenges and potential opportunities.

It concludes with a set of strategic goals and action for consideration. These are discussed in the following sections.

### **The agri-food sector contributes significantly to Ontario's economy**

According to the Consultant report, Ontario's agri-food system generates more than \$177 billion dollars in sales of primary agriculture, food and beverage processing, wholesaling, food services, and retail food. Ontario's agri-business industry created approximately 29,823 total full-time equivalent positions (direct, indirect and induced) in 2016.

The level of economic impact for Ontario's agri-food sector, in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was almost \$49 billion in 2016. Most of this food processing occurs within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, with a significant amount of processing occurring in York Region. The economic impact of the entire agri-food chain in York Region is \$2.7 billion.

The outlook for this sector is positive as total employment generated by the Ontario agri-business industry increased by approximately 31 per cent since 2013.

### **York Region's gross farm sales outperformed the Provincial average**

For primary food production, gross farm sales (a measure of farm business income) continue to rise across the Region, totalling approximately \$301 million in 2016. This is a similar trend across Ontario and is attributed to a number of things including inflation, farm efficiency, declining input costs per acre for some crops, increase in food prices and technological advancements.

In 2016, farms in York Region outperformed the provincial average farm cash receipts per acre by \$1,000 due to production of high value crops, for example vegetables. Of all its six neighbouring Regional municipalities, the Region was the top performer in terms of cash receipts per acre. This is shown in Attachment 1.

East Gwillimbury in particular had notably high numbers of farm cash receipts per acre almost five times the Provincial value. This is followed by Vaughan, King, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill group, Markham and Georgina. This is shown in Attachment 2.

### **Agriculture and agri-food has measureable impact on jobs across the Region**

There are 27 industries in the agri-food sector ranging from primary production to retail. These account for 11 per cent of total employment in the Region. In King, East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville the agri-food sector represents 19



## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

per cent, 15 per cent and 16 per cent of jobs respectively. The complete municipal breakdown is shown in Attachment 3.

In primary production there are 3,578 jobs while in the full agri-food sector there are 57,000 jobs. Most of the job growth in York Region's agri-food sector is at the consumer end – in food manufacturing and restaurant and grocery store workers – which correlates with the population growth in York Region

### **There is evidence of industry consolidation throughout the Region**

The number of farms and farm acreage in York Region has declined, however this is a province-wide trend. In 2016, there were 712 working farms in York Region down from 828 in 2011, a 14 per cent decline, the highest compared to the surrounding Regions.

Notably, farm acreage has not declined at the same rate as the number of farms, instead the average size of farms has increased. The number of farms in the "Gross Farm Receipts less than \$100,000 and \$100,000 to \$500,000" categories has declined. Conversely, the number of farms with "Gross Farm Receipts greater than \$500,000" has stayed relatively steady since 2011. These findings indicate that there is consolidation in the sector.

Over the period, Georgina and Vaughan experienced the largest declines in the number of farms, over 32 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. Livestock farms experienced the largest decline and account for more than 50 per cent of the reduction in the number of farms since 2001. The largest decline in farm acreage was in Whitchurch-Stouffville (31 per cent) and Georgina at (28 per cent).

### **Survey respondents identified a number of opportunities and concerns for agriculture in York Region**

Based on the survey responses, the top five opportunities for the agri-food sector were identified as:

- access to a large urban market
- unique and high quality agricultural land
- consumer interest in local food
- broadband internet access
- policies that protect agricultural land.

## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

Respondents indicated that the top five concerns for York Region's agri-food sector are:

- urbanization
- high cost of inputs
- lack of government support
- restrictive land use policies
- access to land

In 2016, about 52 per cent of farm land was rented, leased or crop shared. This is much higher than the Provincial average of about 32 percent. In Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill, approximately 65 per cent of the land is either rented, leased or crop shared, which is the highest of all the local municipalities in York Region.

Respondents expressed a concern about succession planning as the average age of producers in the Region has increased marginally from 56.9 in 2011 to 58 in 2016. This is a similar trend across Canada.

The complete list supportive and limiting trends are shown in Attachment 4.

### **The strategy presents five goals to address the challenges and opportunities identified**

Research, consultation and analysis resulted in the development of five strategic goals with associated objectives for consideration:

**Goal 1:** Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector

Objectives:

- i. Foster more communication between York Regional council, staff, lower tier municipalities and other organization to enable collaboration, business growth and local food awareness.
- ii. Facilitate and support existing organizations and collaborations with municipal, provincial and industry organizations to deliver programming in an effect and cost-efficient manner.

**Goal 2:** Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development

## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

Objective: Encourage regional and municipal land use policies, development fees and approval processes to align with updated provincial policy and support York Region's agri-food sector now and in the future.

**Goal 3:** Support increased capacity for value added processing and support services

Objective: Connect local producers with value added and processing opportunities which attracting new investment.

**Goal 4:** Leverage the Region's location within the Greater Toronto Area through direct farm marketing to meet demand for local food production

Objective: Strengthen direct farm marketing and local food opportunities.

**Goal 5:** Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region

Objective: Support existing agricultural operations in the Region by leveraging opportunities for value-added production and/or expansion.

The executive summary is provided as Attachment 5. The full [Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy](#) is available on the York Region website at York.ca.

### **Many of the activities identified in the strategy are already underway**

There are 45 action items in the strategy with York Region identified to lead or be involved in 41 or 90 per cent of the activities. 24 of the activities are new activities for consideration while the remaining 21 (just over 46 per cent) are either planned or already underway as described below. These include, continuing to support the monitoring of the Province's development of the agricultural impact assessment guidelines, supporting the production of the Farm Fresh Map, supporting the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance on a project basis, creating a directory that includes names and contact information of producers in the Region to be used for collecting employment data and supporting the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group by allocating budget for special projects.

There are several proposed new actions which may have resource implications in particular: creating a York Region agri-food specialist staff position and developing and implementing an agricultural community improvement plan to provide incentives for on-farm value added operations. Staff will continue to evaluate the action items and work with the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group to bring forward a work plan.

## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

A summarized list of action items grouped by status (underway, planned or new) is outlined in Attachment 6.

### **5. Financial Implications**

The strategy identifies a number of strategic objectives and actions for consideration as a part of implementation. Some of these are no cost or low cost or are already being pursued by the Region, while others have potential resource and budget implications. Staff will address any budget requirements as part of the Region's budget process based on the development of a work plan in consultation with the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group.

### **6. Local Municipal Impact**

The mandate of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group supports and complements the goals and interests of all the Region's municipal partners. Staff from several local municipalities have attended Liaison Group meetings and participated in the development and review of the strategy.

The strategy will be provided to the local municipalities to be leveraged as they develop agriculture strategies.

### **7. Conclusion**

Through the development of the agriculture and agri-food sector strategy, York Region is demonstrating strong commitment to the agriculture sector. The strategy provides a better understanding of the linkage between agricultural production and regional economic vitality. The strategic goals identified provide a guide for ongoing support of agriculture in the Region.

The action items recommended will be reviewed and considered as staff continues to work with the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and other partners to develop a work plan to support the agriculture sector. These will be reported as a part of the annual agriculture update and Council approval requested as necessary.

For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503.

## **York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Update and Strategy**

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

September 29, 2017

Attachments (6)

#7897141

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request

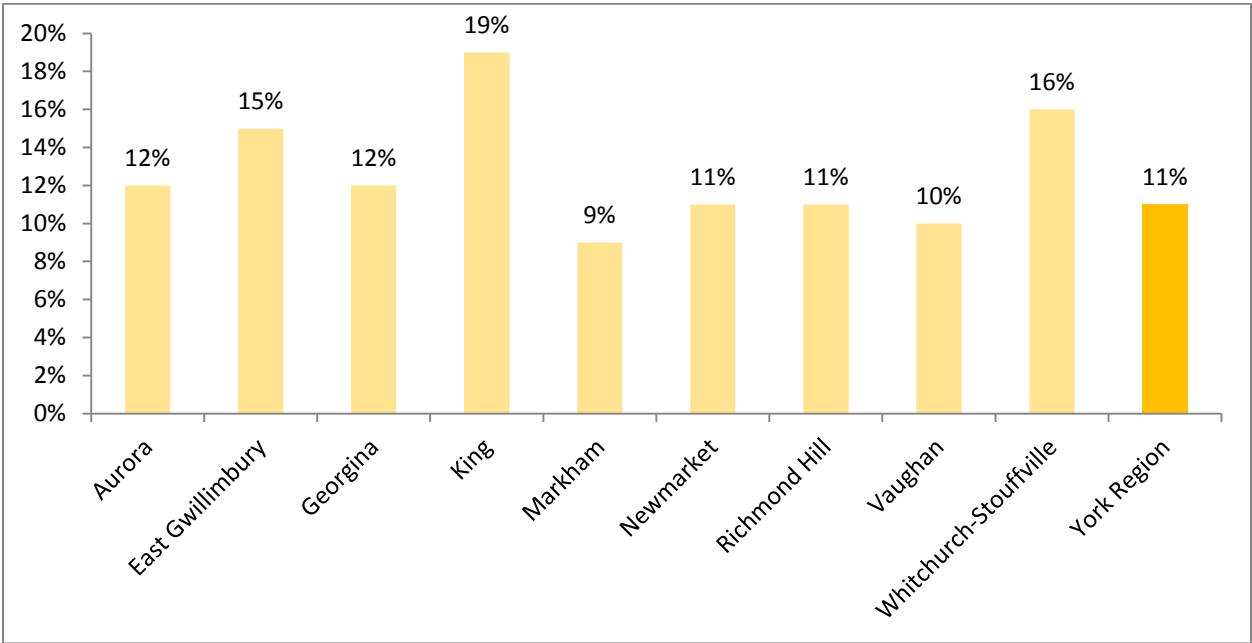
**Ranking regional municipalities by cash receipts per acre**

Region	Total gross farm receipts		Acres			
	2016	% of Ontario	2016	% of Ontario	Gross Farm Receipts per Acre (2016)	Rank by gross farm receipts per acre
Ontario	\$15,126,845,283		9,021,298		\$1,677	n/a
<b>York</b>	<b>\$301,462,398</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>108,102</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>\$2,789</b>	<b>1</b>
Halton	\$143,802,693	1.0%	52,602	0.6%	\$2,734	2
Wellington	\$943,242,755	6.2%	380,733	4.2%	\$2,477	3
Durham	\$321,749,341	2.1%	215,608	2.4%	\$1,492	4
Peel	\$94,134,919	0.6%	67,408	0.7%	\$1,396	5
Dufferin	\$157,496,017	1.0%	117,272	1.3%	\$1,343	6
Simcoe	\$447,757,741	3.0%	372,901	4.1%	\$1,201	7

**Ranking of local municipalities by gross farm receipts per acre**

Census Consolidated Subdivision	2016	% change from 2011	% of York Region	Rank by % York Region Gross Farm	2016	% change from 2011	Gross Farm receipts per Acre	Rank by Gross Farm receipts per Acre
East Gwillimbury	\$96,797,280	40.1%	32.1%	1	18,872	-26.2%	\$5,129	1
King	\$83,898,106	17.4%	27.8%	2	29,535	0.9%	\$2,841	3
Whitchurch-Stouffville	\$33,724,735	-1.0%	11.2%	3	13,668	-31.1%	\$2,467	4
Markham	\$33,164,453	27.5%	11.0%	4	18,648	115.0%	\$1,778	6
Vaughan	\$26,171,283	7.1%	8.7%	5	6,447	27.9%	\$4,059	2
Georgina	\$20,709,539	23.3%	6.9%	6	17,371	-28.0%	\$1,192	7
Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill	\$6,997,002	13.7%	2.3%	7	3,561	-12.1%	\$1,965	5

**Employment Impact of Agriculture and Agri-food in York Region**

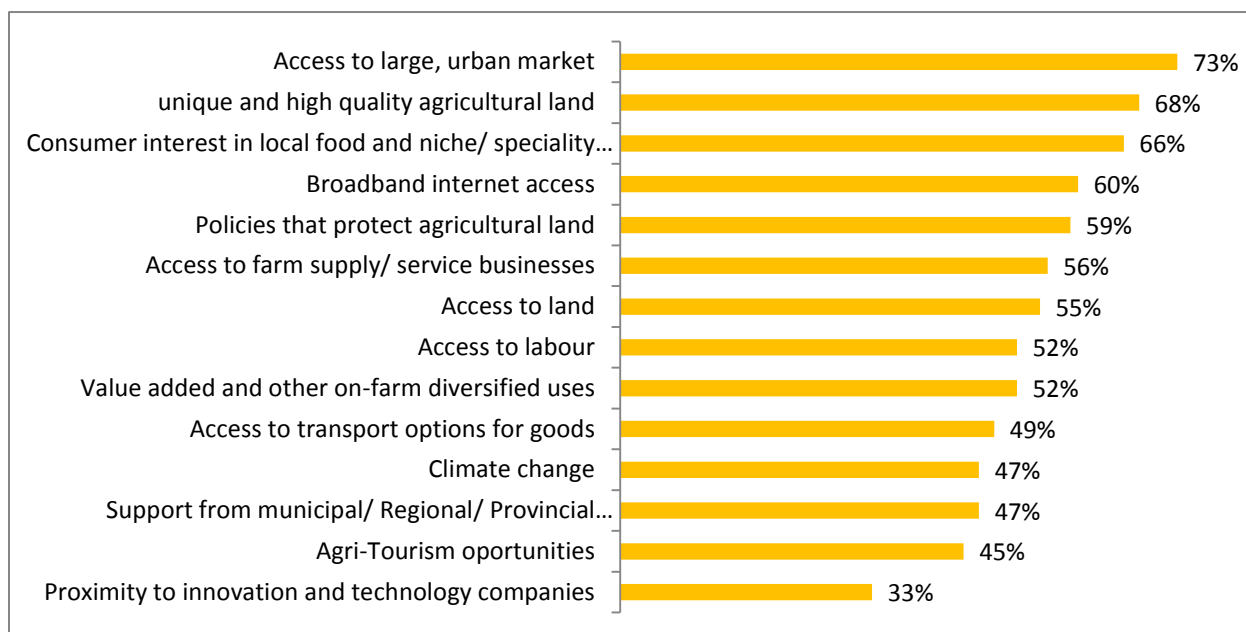


Note: Agriculture and agri-food includes jobs 27 industries from primary production to retail.

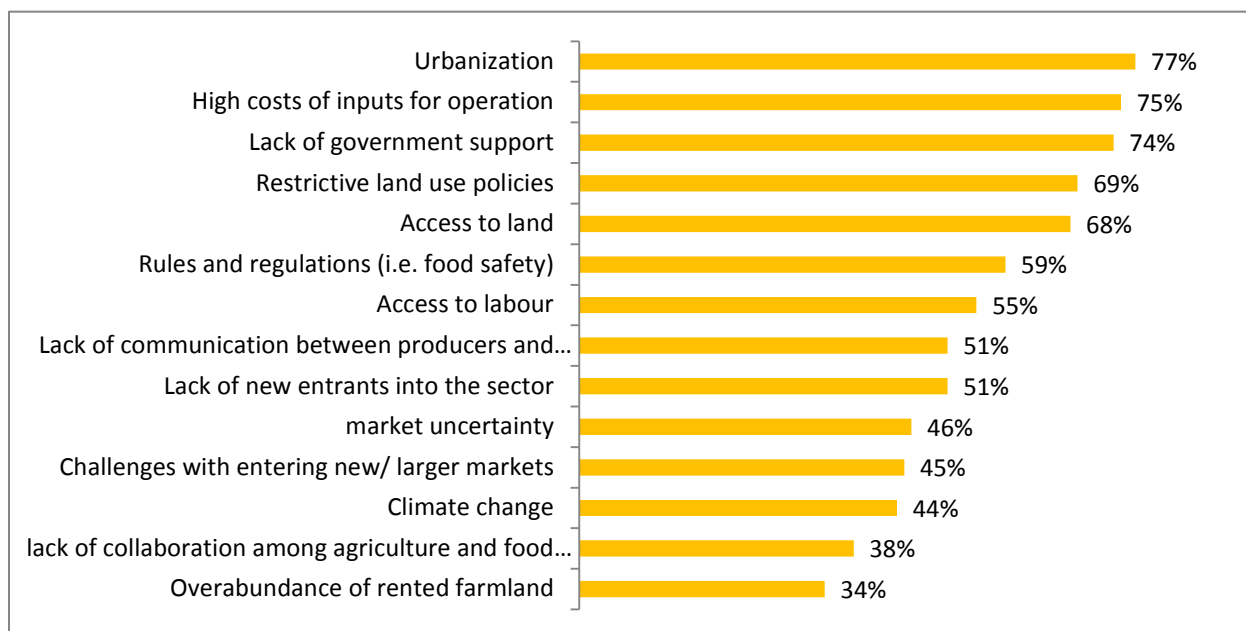


## Trends that support and limit agriculture in York Region

### Supporting trends



### Limiting trends



THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK | September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017

# Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy Executive Summary

Project Lead: Bronwynne Wilton, PhD  
Synthesis Agri-Food Network  
100 Stone Road West, Suite 109  
Guelph, Ontario N1G 5L3  
519-822-7272

## Executive Summary

As one of Canada's fastest growing communities, York Region is anticipated to grow from 1.1 million to 1.5 million by the year 2031. This forecasted growth has created unique opportunities and challenges for York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector. While a growing population means more pressure on the existing land base in York Region, it also provides access to a large and diverse customer base for primary producers and processors. The purpose of this agriculture and agri-food sector strategy is to understand the sector's current strengths, opportunities and challenges while also developing an action plan for the future. The York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy demonstrates York Region's commitment to supporting the long-term economic prosperity and viability of the agri-food sector.

This strategy was informed by two research phases including a public stakeholder effort and an economic impact analysis of York Region's agri-food sector. These efforts are timely as the updated Census of Agriculture was released in May, 2017. This executive summary provides an overview of the strategy, while the full report presents a complete account of the work undertaken. [Section 7](#) outlines each strategic goal area in full detail, including timelines, lead responsibilities and performance metrics.

***This strategy is a living and breathing document that should be implemented and updated as the Agri-food sector evolves in York Region***

York Region's Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy includes 5 strategic goal areas, accompanied by 45 recommended actions. Eighteen of these action items are on-going in scope while six are short-term (within one year), nineteen are medium (two-four years) and two are long-term (greater than four years).



Figure 1: Structure of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy

York Region has demonstrated a commitment to a vibrant and sustainable agri-food sector through the *York Region Official Plan, 2010*; *Vision 2051*; and the *Region's Economic Development Action Plan*. These existing documents shaped the overall vision for this strategy. This strategy will add value to these policies and strategies by providing York Regional staff and Council with a roadmap to ensure agriculture remains a strong and viable sector in the future. It is crucial to have a comprehensive and informed strategy in place that will help the Region accommodate future opportunities and challenges.



Figure 2: Guiding principles for overall vision for the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy from the Regional Municipality of York (Vision 2051 and the Official Plan)

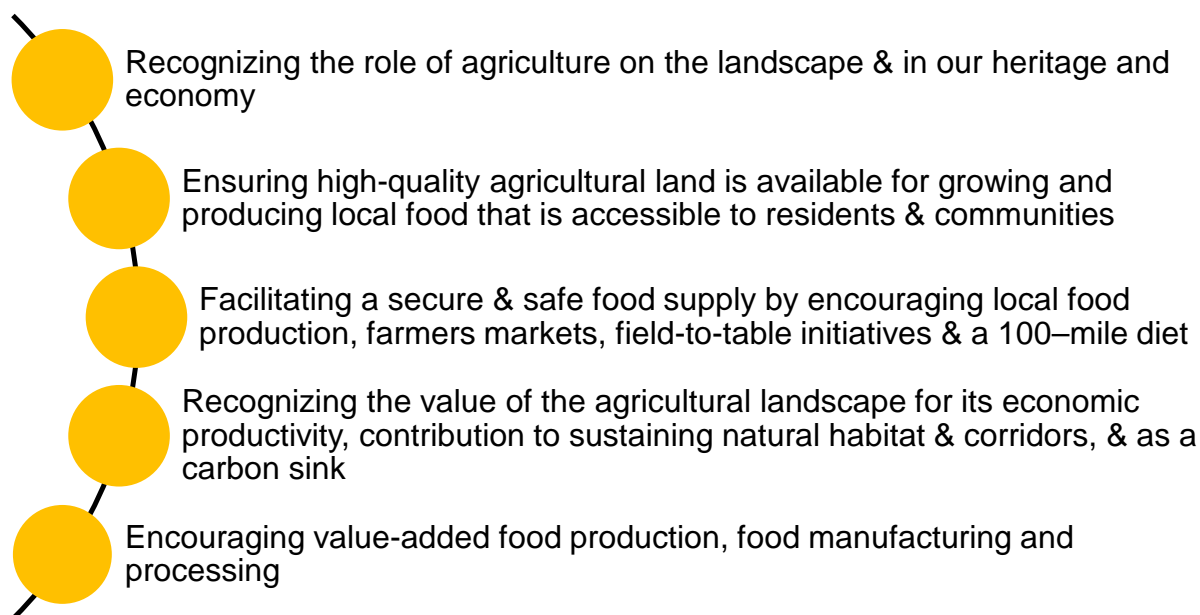


Figure 3: Core Principles from Vision 2051 (A Resilient Natural Environment and Agricultural System)

The quadrant below is a summary of the SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats) exercise based on online survey, key informant interviews and open house findings.

<b>Strengths</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity to markets and diverse customer base</li> <li>• York Region is a “great place to do business”</li> <li>• Abundance of prime agricultural land</li> <li>• One of two provincial Specialty crop areas (Holland Marsh)</li> <li>• Strong agricultural heritage</li> <li>• Diverse range of production across the Region (livestock, field crops, vegetable production)</li> <li>• Strong broadband connectivity in some parts of the Region</li> </ul>	<b>Challenges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urbanization and growth across the Region</li> <li>• Challenging regulatory environment</li> <li>• Lack of profile for agriculture in the Region</li> <li>• Broadband connectivity issues in some parts of the Region</li> <li>• History of poor consultation and communication with the agricultural sector</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing demand for local food and specialty products</li> <li>• Agri-tourism</li> <li>• Educational opportunities</li> <li>• Technology and innovation (vertical farming, improved farming practices)</li> <li>• Demand for healthy food (Interest in local food procurement)</li> <li>• Rouge National Urban Park</li> <li>• Unique Partnerships</li> </ul>	<b>Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forecasted growth and urbanization</li> <li>• Difficult for new entrants into the sector</li> <li>• High rental land rates may result in less sustainable farming practices (not invested in long-term production)</li> <li>• Tightening of provincial regulations may limit on farm value-added opportunities</li> </ul>

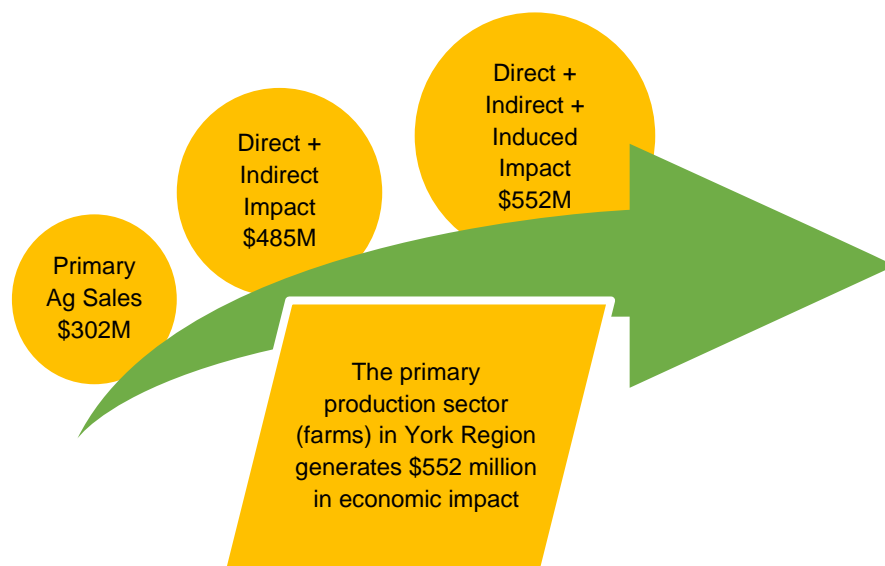
Figure 4: York Region Agri-Food sector SCOT Analysis (based on stakeholder consultation findings)

### **Census of Agriculture and Economic Impact Analysis Findings**

Key findings from the updated Census of Agriculture and economic impact analysis include:

- The number of farms in York Region has dropped since 2001 and has decreased by 116 since 2011, yet the average size of farms is increasing
- Gross farm receipts per farm, which is a measure of farm business income, is increasing across the Region
- York Region’s farm cash receipts per acre are \$1000 higher than provincial farm cash receipts per acre due in part to high value crop production (such as vegetables)
  - East Gwillimbury in particular has notably high farm cash receipts value per acre

- The average age of producers in York Region has increased from 56.9 in 2011 to 58 in 2016, which is reflective of overall trends across Canada
- Data on direct farm marketing was included for the first time in the 2016 Census; 20% of farms in York Region reported direct-to-consumer sales using farm gate sales/kiosks/pick-your-own (compared to 15% in Ontario)
- In York Region, 52.7% of the land is either rented, leased or crop shared (compared to 32.4% in Ontario)
- The economic impact of primary production agriculture in York Region extends well beyond the \$302 million of direct farm cash receipts in 2016.
- When the indirect and induced economic activity are included the total economic impact is over \$552 million<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 5: York Region Primary Production (Farms) Sector Economic Contribution*

The strategic goals, objectives and recommended action items have been included below. While this provides an overview of York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy, the strategy should be reviewed in full to ensure a complete understanding of the trends and issues informing this strategy now and in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Please note, total economic impact has been calculated for primary production rather than the entire agri-food value chain. Primary production was selected for analysis as calculating for the entire agri-food sector tends to overstate economic contribution (due to double counts).

## Overview of Strategic Goals, Objectives and Recommended Actions

Note: This strategy covers the time period of **September 2017-September 2022 (five years in total)**, however, a number of these actions and activities should be considered as ongoing beyond 2022.

GOALS				
Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector	Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development	Support increased capacity for value added agri-food processing and support services.	Leverage location within the GTA and proximity to customers through direct farm marketing to meet demand for local food production	Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region.
OBJECTIVES				
i) Foster more communication to enable collaboration, business growth and local food awareness ii) Facilitate and support existing and emerging organizations to deliver programming in an effective and cost-efficient manner.	Encourage regional and municipal land use policies, development fees & approval processes to align with updated provincial policy and support York Region's agri-food sector now and in the future	Connect local producers with value added & processing opportunities, while attracting new investment.	Support and facilitate opportunities to meet local food demand through direct farm marketing.	Support existing agricultural operations in the Region by leveraging opportunities for value-added production and/or expansion.



**Strategic Goal #1: Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector.**

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
1.1.	Create a York Region agri-food specialist role dedicated to supporting the Agri-food sector in York through business retention and expansion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This position requires someone with an educational background in agriculture due to the complexity of the agriculture sector in York Region</li> <li>This role would liaise between economic development and planning, while investing time and leadership into YRAALG</li> </ul>		✓		
1.2.	Build internal staff capacity at the Regional level to provide direction to lower tiers on agri-food issues; coordinate programming and initiatives between planning, economic development and tourism at the Regional level through an annual staff agri-food workshop (could include tours of local farms, processing plants, and guest speakers)	✓			
1.3.	Develop a communication roadmap/strategy to ensure open and transparent communication pathways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen communication by developing and distributing a document/handout that helps connect agri-food stakeholder with the appropriate department/staff person if they have a question (e.g. Help understand Regional issue vs. municipal issue)</li> </ul>		✓		
1.4.	Create a directory/resource that includes names and contact information of producers in the Region; to be used by the Region for collecting employment data, information, etc.			✓	
1.5.	Create annual opportunity to collect feedback from the agri-food sector to strengthen York Region staff and Council's understanding of farm and food businesses and their needs by engaging with local famers and agri-food experts	✓			

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through open house consultation, work with agri-food sector to identify aspects of public infrastructure supportive of the agri-food sector (e.g. roads, drainage, broadband connectivity) requiring attention</li> <li>Ensure meetings/open houses are held at a time that is convenient and accessible for primary producers</li> </ul>				
1.6.	Continue to support and collaborate with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance through projects and update inventory of agri-food assets and resources in York Region including agri-tourism, livestock, equine, etc.	✓			
1.7.	<p>Continue support for the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group (YRAALG) by allocating annual budget for special projects and events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop standard practices to collect feedback on issues prior to reports being drafted</li> <li>Develop advisory memos that outline issues and feedback required with clear timelines</li> <li>Refer agri-food related issues to the advisory group for feedback</li> </ul>			✓	
1.8.	<p>Explore and identify ways to celebrate and showcase agricultural innovators/champions in the Region using existing communication efforts</p> <p>Consider using existing communication efforts such as online newsletters and social media to share videos/photos/blogs about agriculture in York Region</p> <p>Build support and understanding for the agri-food sector by showcasing best practices used by local producers (e.g. minimizing impacts on the environment through sustainability innovations)</p>	✓			

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
1.9.	Seek opportunities to collaborate with partners in York Region and beyond the Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g. Facilitate networking sessions for local producers and restaurant/hospitality stakeholders in the Region/GTA (a “dating service”)</li> </ul>	✓			
1.10.	Develop York Region agri-food educational materials for general public to share at regional and community events (e.g. Fall Fairs). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include accessible data such as contribution of the Region’s agri-food sector and case studies of innovative operations in the Region</li> </ul>	✓			
1.11.	Investigate and explore opportunities for teaching youth about agriculture and food production in the Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g. <a href="#">Agriculture in the Classroom</a></li> </ul>			✓	
1.12.	Demonstrate a commitment to the agri-food sector by supporting agricultural events and conventions through sponsorship or in-kind support	✓			
1.13.	Collaborate with organizations such as Rouge National Park, Oak Ridges Moraine Trust, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), and Ontario Farmland Trust to conduct a study to understand current land stewardship practices used by York producers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E.g. Environmental Farm Plan, Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program</li> </ul>	✓		✓	

**Strategic Goal #2: Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development**

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
2.1.	At next review, update York Region's Official Plan to conform and align with recent changes to the <i>Greenbelt Plan</i> , <i>Growth Plan</i> and <i>Oak Ridges Moraine Plan</i> (2017 updates) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with lower tier municipalities as they review and update processes</li> <li>• <i>A full list of changes to consider is included in Appendix F of this report</i></li> </ul>			✓	
2.2.	Prior to next Official Plan review, reexamine Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) study and determine if updates are needed to reflect changes at the provincial level (agricultural system mapping)			✓	
2.3.	Through the Municipal Comprehensive Review, review York Region's Official Plan (and lower tier plans) agricultural and rural policies to ensure they encourage and support investment and employment in the agriculture sector	✓			
2.4.	Conduct a study that investigates innovative financial mechanisms that incentivize producers and land owners to keep land in agricultural production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestions from consultation include: reduced development charges; reduced farmland tax rates; and a land speculation tax to increase the tax rate for foreign buyers</li> <li>• Identify ways to further incentivize landowners to provide long-term leases to farmers</li> </ul>			✓	

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
2.5.	Conduct a review of policies and regulations related to environmental performance of food processing operations within the Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline process and explore incentives and subsidy programs to assist companies as they transition to clean technologies</li> </ul>		✓		
2.6.	Participate in the upcoming consultation and review for the Greater Golden Horseshoe's Agricultural System policies (led by OMAFRA) which <i>recognizes farmland and clusters of agri-food infrastructure and services need to co-exist alongside rapidly-growing communities and infrastructure</i>		✓		
2.7.	Recognize and acknowledge the agri-food sector's role as an economic driver in the Region through updates to plans and policies, such as York Region's <i>Economic Development Action Plan</i>			✓	
2.8.	Conduct a study and review of edge planning practices and identify planning tools the Region can use to resolve conflicts between adjacent urban and agricultural land uses			✓	
2.9.	Monitor the province's development of <i>Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA)</i> guidelines and provide feedback through consultation with planning staff, YRAALG and other relevant stakeholders	✓			
2.10.	Encourage local municipalities to develop and implement an Agricultural Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to incentivize on-farm diversification and value-added operations	✓			

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
2.11.	Create factsheets and accessible materials to help agri-food stakeholders interpret land use policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on stakeholder feedback, potential topics could include: Farming in the Greenbelt; Interpreting Permitted Uses in Provincially protected areas (Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine)</li> </ul>	✓			

### Strategic Goal #3: Support increased capacity for value-added agri-food processing and support services

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
3.1.	Develop and implement a Food Processing Action Plan that demonstrates York Region is 'open for business' to attract and retain food processing businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sub-sectors to target for continued growth include: bakery and tortilla manufacturing; fruit and vegetable processing; and the beverage sector</li> </ul>			✓	
3.2.	Establish an agri-entrepreneur mentor program in conjunction with the York Small Business Enterprise Centre to support existing and potential entrepreneurs with mentoring and business guidance	✓		✓	

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
3.3.	<p>Investigate and identify opportunities to develop a regional food incubator/hub to support fruit and vegetable value-adding opportunities to increase farm revenue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services could include washing, cutting, quick chill, flash freeze, labelling, cold/frozen/dry storage, packaging while providing a space for training and development (including a commercial kitchen</li> <li>Identify funding opportunities (Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation; Trillium Foundation, etc.)</li> <li>E.g. <a href="#">Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre</a> in Northumberland County</li> </ul>				✓

**Strategic Goal #4: Leverage location within the GTA and proximity to customers through direct farm marketing and meet demand for local food production**

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
4.1.	<p>Facilitate the formation of the York Farm Fresh Organization to support the growth of York's agri-food sector and demand for farm-direct production. Particular efforts to support include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guiding the organization through the development of directional signage</li> <li>Facilitate the development of an online platform that consumers can use to find local farms/products (an interactive map)</li> </ul>	✓			

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
4.2.	Continue annual production of the York Region Farm Fresh Guide Map and initiatives like the Pumpkin Pie Trail Map to promote and raise awareness of locally produced agricultural products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Release the Farm Fresh Guide map and Pumpkin Pie Trail Map in additional languages to reflect the Region's diversity and attract larger numbers</li> <li>Release the maps by April 15<sup>th</sup> each year</li> </ul>		✓		
4.3.	As encouraged in the Regional Official Plan, continue to support the provision of community gardens and/or urban agriculture projects that promote agricultural awareness in settlement/urban areas through educational programs/initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify ways to synergize community gardens and the food incubator/hub (Action 3.4) if successfully implemented</li> </ul>	✓			
4.4.	Support the development of agri-tourism programming such as "Farm Tour Hikes" (an organized, self-guided farm tour in cooperation with local farm organizations)	✓			
4.5.	Raise awareness around the diversity of production and processing found in the Region through promotional materials (e.g. Ontario's 'soup and salad bowl' in the Holland Marsh; world crop production)	✓			
4.6.	Revisit York Region's Food Charter and broaden support across the agri-food sector	✓			
4.7.	Develop local food-sourcing policies for Regional facilities and encourage other public sector agencies within the Region to adopt similar policies			✓	



Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
4.8.	Facilitate relationship building between producer, processors and retail companies that support local food production (e.g. Longos, Metro) through networking events			✓	
4.9.	Communicate and promote existing online tools to help connect producers with the local market through workshops and seminars. Examples of existing programs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Ontario Fresh</a> is an online network and marketing service designed to help Ontario businesses buy and sell more food</li> <li>• <a href="#">Farm to City</a> links farmers to customers seeking locally-produced beef</li> </ul>			✓	
4.10.	Partner with <b>Rouge National Urban Park</b> and <b>Toronto and Region Conservation Authority</b> to increase collaboration and learning amongst new entrants in to the agri-food sector and with agri-tourism businesses and potential new entrants into agri-tourism through hikes, education programs and/or peer-to-peer learning groups			✓	

**Strategic Goal #5: Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region**

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
5.1.	Conduct Agriculture and Agri-Food Retention and Expansion studies (supported by OMAFRA) to assess and evaluate the needs and opportunities in each lower-tier municipality			✓	

Action Item	Summary of Recommended Actions	Ongoing	Short Term (1 Year)	Medium Term (2-4 Years)	Long Term (4+ years)
5.2.	Conduct a study and develop a long-term sustainability strategy for the Holland Marsh through collaboration with stakeholders and partners (e.g. Simcoe County, Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority, Holland Marsh Growers' Association, OMAFRA, etc.)			✓	
5.3.	Continue to work with industry and government agencies to support the employment of seasonal and foreign agricultural workers, with respect to working conditions, accommodations, cultural services and accessibility to workers	✓			
5.4.	Undertake an equine industry study and consultation to identify barriers and opportunities for growing the Region's equine industry including research on successes in other regions (e.g. Greater Toronto Area, Caledon, Halton Hills, etc.)			✓	
5.5.	Explore opportunities to increase the production of world crops within York Region			✓	
5.6.	Continue support to improve broadband connectivity across the Region through the Region's Broadband Strategy; particularly in rural and agricultural areas to help businesses develop and grow	✓			
5.7.	Develop template and prepare annual report card to record and evaluate achievements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop indicators and measures of success for the agri-food sector to track the overall health of the sector and identify appropriate adjustments</li> </ul>	✓			
5.8.	Conduct a five-year review of York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy				✓

**Action items arranged by status (underway, planned or new)**

GOAL	DESCRIPTION
<b>Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, lower tier municipalities and the agri-food sector</b>	<p><b><u>UNDERWAY</u></b></p> <p><b>1.2</b> Build internal staff capacity to provide direction to lower tiers on agri-food issues; coordinate programming and initiatives between planning and economic development and tourism at the Regional level. <b>ONGOING- York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.6</b> Continue to support and collaborate with GHFFA through projects. <b>ONGOING- York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.7</b> Continue support for the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group (YRAALG) by allocating annual budget for special projects and events. <b>MEDIUM – York Region</b></p> <p><b><u>PLANNED</u></b></p> <p><b>1.1</b> Create a York Region agri-food specialist role dedicated to supporting growth of existing businesses, attracting new investments and promoting the Agri-food sector in York Region. <b>SHORT TERM- York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.12</b> Demonstrate a commitment to the agri-food sector by supporting agricultural events and conventions through sponsorship or in-kind support. <b>ONGOING - York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.4</b> Create a directory/resource that includes names and contact information of producers in the Region; to be used by the Region for collecting employment data. <b>MEDIUM – York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.10</b> Develop York Region agri-food educational materials for general public to share at regional and community events. <b>ONGOING – York Region + local municipalities</b></p> <p><b><u>NEW</u></b></p> <p><b>1.3</b> Develop a communication roadmap/strategy to ensure open and transparent communication pathways. <b>Short- York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.5</b> Create annual opportunity to collect feedback from the agri-food sector to strengthen York Region staff and Council's understanding of farm and food businesses and their needs by engaging with local famers and agri-food experts. <b>MEDIUM – York Region</b></p>

	<p><b>1.8</b> Explore and identify ways to celebrate and showcase agricultural innovators/champions in the Region using existing communication efforts. <b>ONGOING – York Region + local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>1.9</b> Seek opportunities to collaborate with partners in York Region and beyond the Region. <b>ONGOING- Led by partners and supported by York Region</b></p> <p><b>1.11</b> Investigate and explore opportunities for teaching youth about agriculture and food production in the Region. <b>MEDIUM-YRAALG + YRFA and community groups</b></p> <p><b>1.13</b> Collaborate with organizations such as Rouge National Park, Oak Ridges Moraine Trust, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), and Ontario Farmland Trust to conduct study to understand current land stewardship practices used by York producers. <b>MEDIUM – York Region + local municipalities</b></p>
<b>Support agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development</b>	<p><b><u>UNDERWAY</u></b></p> <p><b>2.1.</b> At next review, update York Region's Official Plan to conform and align with recent changes to the Greenbelt Plan, Growth Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Plan (2017 updates)- <b>MEDIUM - York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>2.2.</b> Prior to next Official Plan review, conduct a Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) study to collect updated data on quality of soils, fragmentation, conflicting uses and production in York Region. <b>Medium - York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>2.3</b> Through the Municipal Comprehensive Review, review York Region's Official Plan (and lower tier plans) related to overall agricultural strategies, land use policies, acceptable uses, as well as application processes and development fees to ensure they encourage. <b>ONGOING - York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>2.6</b> Participate in the upcoming consultation and review for the Greater Golden Horseshoe's Agricultural System policies (led by OMAFRA) - <b>Medium - York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>2.8</b> Conduct a study and review of edge planning practices and identify planning tools the Region can use to resolve conflicts between adjacent urban and agricultural land uses- - <b>MEDIUM – Partner</b></p> <p><b>2.9</b> Monitor the province's development of Agricultural Impact</p>

	<p>Assessment (AIA) guidelines and provide feedback through consultation with planning staff and other relevant stakeholders - <b>ONGOING - York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b><u>PLANNED</u></b></p> <p><b>2.7</b> Recognize and acknowledge the agri-food sector's role as an economic driver in the Region through updates to plans and policies. <b>Medium- YR</b></p> <p><b><u>NEW</u></b></p> <p><b>2.4 NEW:</b> Conduct a study that investigates innovative financial mechanisms that incentivize producers and land owners to keep land in agricultural production. <b>Medium - York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>2.5</b> Conduct a review of policies and regulations related to environmental performance of food processing operations within the Region. <b>SHORT- York Region</b></p> <p><b>2.10</b> Encourage the lower tier municipalities to develop and implement an Agricultural Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to incentivize on-farm diversification and value-added operations. - <b>ONGOING - local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>2.11</b> Create factsheets and accessible materials to help agri-food stakeholders interpret land use policies- <b>Ongoing - York Region+ Municipalities</b></p>
Support increased capacity for value added processing and support services	<p><b><u>UNDERWAY</u></b></p> <p><b>3.2</b> Establish an agri-entrepreneur mentor program in conjunction with the York Small Business Enterprise Centre to support existing and potential entrepreneurs with mentoring and business guidance. <b>MEDIUM ONGOING York Region + local municipalities</b></p> <p><b><u>NEW</u></b></p> <p><b>3.1</b> Develop and implement a Food Processing Action Plan that demonstrates York Region is 'open for business' to attract and retain food processing businesses. <b>MEDIUM York Region + local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>3.3</b> Investigate and identify opportunities to develop a regional food incubator/hub to support fruit and vegetable value-adding opportunities to increase farm revenue. <b>LONG- York Region + local municipalities</b></p>

<p><b>Leverage within the GTA and proximity to customers through direct farm marketing to meet demand for local food production</b></p>	<p><b><u>UNDERWAY</u></b></p> <p><b>4.2</b> Continue annual production of the York Region Farm Fresh Guide Map and Pumpkin Pie Trail Map to promote and raise awareness of locally produced agricultural products. <b>SHORT-York Region</b></p> <p><b>4.3</b> Continue to support and encourage the provision of community gardens and/or urban agriculture projects that promote agricultural awareness in settlement/urban areas. <b>ONGOING- York Region+ local municipalities</b></p> <p><b>4.4</b> Support the development of agri-tourism programming such as “Farm Tour Hikes”. <b>ONGOING- York Region</b></p> <p><b><u>PLANNED</u></b></p> <p><b>4.1</b> Facilitate the revitalization of the York Farm Fresh Organization to support the growth of York’s agri-food sector and demand for farm-direct production. <b>ONGOING- York Region + Municipalities</b></p> <p><b>4.6</b> Revisit York Region’s Food Charter and broaden support across the agri-food sector. <b>ONGOING York Region + local Municipalities</b></p> <p><b><u>NEW</u></b></p> <p><b>4.5</b> Raise awareness around the diversity of production and processing found in the Region through promotional materials (e.g. Ontario’s ‘soup and salad bowl’ in the Holland Marsh; world crop production). <b>ONGOING- York Region</b></p> <p><b>4.7</b> Develop local food-sourcing policies for Regional facilities and encourage other public sector agencies within the Region to adopt similar policies. <b>MEDIUM- York Region + local Municipalities</b></p> <p><b>4.8</b> Facilitate relationship building between producer, processors and retail companies that support local food production (e.g. Longos, Metro) <b>MEDIUM- York Region</b></p> <p><b>4.9</b> Communicate and <b>promote opportunities</b> to connect producers with the local market. <b>MEDIUM – York Region</b></p> <p><b>4.10</b> Partner with Rouge National Urban Park and Toronto Region Conservation to increase collaboration and learning amongst agri- businesses and potential new entrants into agri-</p>
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	<p>tourism through hikes, education programs and/or peer-to-peer learning groups. <b>MEDIUM- York Region</b></p>
<p><b>Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agriculture production within York Region</b></p>	<p><b><u>UNDERWAY</u></b></p> <p>5.5 Continue support to improve broadband connectivity across the Region through the Region's Broadband Strategy; particularly in rural and agricultural areas to help businesses develop and grow. <b>ONGOING- York Region + local Municipalities:</b></p> <p><b><u>NEW</u></b></p> <p>5.1. Conduct a study and develop a long-term sustainability strategy for the Holland Marsh through collaboration with stakeholders and partners (e.g. Simcoe County, Lake Simcoe Regional Conservation Authority, Holland Marsh Growers' Association, OMAFRA, etc.) <b>MEDIUM- Partner</b></p> <p>5.2. Work with industry and government agencies to support the employment of seasonal and foreign agricultural workers, with respect to working conditions, accommodations, cultural services and accessibility to workers. <b>ONGOING</b></p> <p>5.3. Undertake an equine industry study and consultation to identify barriers and opportunities for growing the <b>Region's</b> equine industry including research on successes in other regions (e.g. Greater Toronto Area, Caledon, Halton Hills, etc.).. <b>MEDIUM- local municipalities</b></p> <p>5.4 Explore opportunities to increase the production of world crops within York Region. <b>Short and Ongoing: York Region + Municipalities:</b></p> <p>5.6 Develop template and prepare annual report card to record and evaluate achievements. <b>Ongoing- York Region + Municipalities</b></p> <p>5.7 Conduct a five-year review of York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy. <b>Long - York Region + Municipalities</b></p> <p><b>5.8</b> Conduct Business Retention and Expansion studies (led by OMAFRA) to assess and evaluate the needs and opportunities in each lower-tier municipality with a focus on agri-food related services and businesses - <b>MEDIUM - York Region + Municipalities: NEW</b></p>