

Peterborough Social Planning Council releases the results of its “Local Food & What We Think About Buying Local: the Future of Food & Farming”

(for the complete report go to our website at www.pspc.on.ca)

The Peterborough Social Planning Council has been researching the changing face of agriculture in the context of food security and the changing social fabric of our rural communities since 2011, when we first partnered with Farms At Work to prepare the discussion document: **“The Future of Peterborough Food & Farming: A Call for Reflection & Discussion”**.

The purpose was to raise awareness about our changing farm community within the context of local food production. Agriculture is an economic and social driver with significant impact on our community social fabric. It's also key to local food security. Local production preserves farmland, helps the environment by reducing food miles and expands the local food market for producers. Buying local means you have access to the freshest food available while supporting your neighbours and building community.

How is the agricultural sector changing in our community?

- Since 1971, the County of Peterborough has lost 36% of its farms. That's 599 farm businesses lost.
- Almost 91,000 farmland acres (28%) went out of production in the County from 1971 to 2011. In the last 5 years alone, more than 20,000 acres have been lost.
- The average age of farm operators in the County continues to rise, going from 52.7 years in 2001 to 56.5 years in 2011. This suggests that approximately half of area farmers may retire in the next 10-15 years with few young farmers to take their place.

The Peterborough Social Planning Council (PSPC) designed and circulated a survey on attitudes towards buying local food. The main goal was to gauge the public's purchasing habits and attitudes toward local foods in order to advance policy development efforts in this area.

We asked people to respond to questions about:

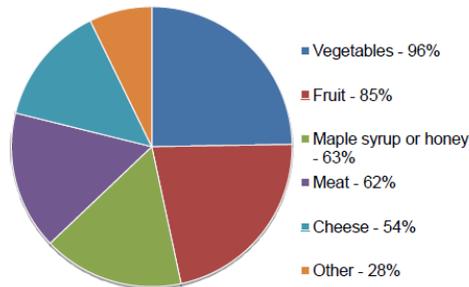
- their purchasing habits, perceptions and attitudes towards local foods;
- how they define local foods (in terms of distance travelled and region of production); how they see their role in the local food economy (consumer, producer, distributor, etc.);
- their access to and the availability of local foods from different food retailers.

There were 538 responses to the survey.

Here are some of the findings:

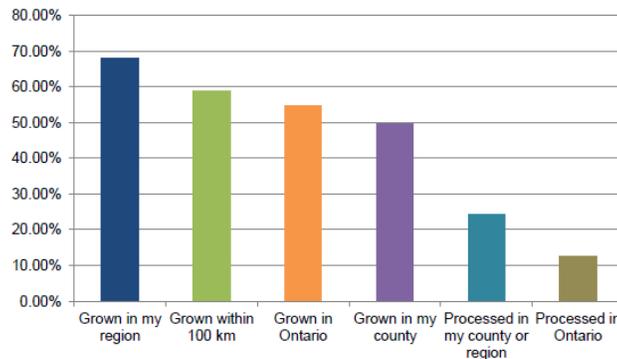
Nearly all survey respondents (94%) had bought local food in the last six months. Farmers' markets were the most popular spot to buy it, followed by grocery stores. Farm gate sales and health food stores were considerably less popular.

Types of Local Food Purchased



Nearly all survey respondents bought local vegetables. Fruit was also highly popular. Far fewer respondents bought local cheeses, meats, and maple syrup or honey.

Definitions of Local Food



The top five definitions of local food among respondents were, in descending order: grown in my region, grown within 100 km, grown in Ontario, grown in my county, and grown on a family farm.

For most respondents, the distance necessary to travel to buy local food was not prohibitive. Nor was the time it takes to find local food when shopping. Respondents were split about whether or not the cost of local food is comparable to what they would otherwise buy. More people disagreed than agreed that it is difficult to know if food is local or not. Most respondents find it easy to get locally produced foods in summer, but less so in winter. About one-third felt to some degree that they have little control over whether or not they buy local food.

Beliefs about local foods

There was a strong feeling that the quality of local food is very high. More than half said local food stays fresh for as long as non-local food (though in the written comments several said they find that local food stays fresh longer). There was almost unanimous agreement that buying local food helps maintain the vibrancy of rural communities in Ontario, reduces the threat of losing family farms to suburban sprawl and industrial scale farming, and that buying local foods is important to support the local economy. There was strong belief that buying local foods is a positive choice for the environment as well, though in the comments section many respondents wrote that on the question of environmental credentials, farming practices matter as much to them as distance from farm to table alone.

“[M]ore education regarding local foods and why they are important would be useful. I think many people do not understand the connection between cheap oil, low food prices, malnutrition and climate change, not to mention loss of community and self-sufficiency, all of which come into play when food sources are industrialised and run according to corporate interests.”

Propensity to buy local foods

Nearly half of all survey respondents strongly agreed that they intentionally buy locally produced food whenever possible. Fewer, just over one third, strongly agreed with the statement “I make it a priority to buy locally produced food.”

Promotion of local foods

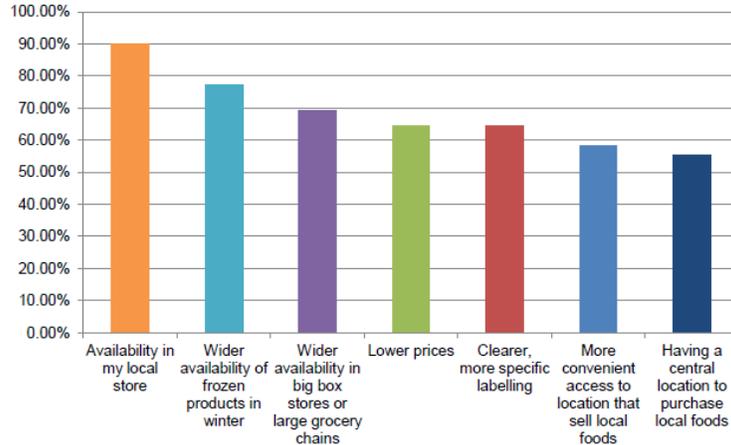
Statement	Mean	Percent						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The government should promote buying locally grown food	1.71	70.4%	12.5%	7.4%	3.1%	2.1%	1.4%	3.1%
The government should promote the institutional purchasing of locally grown food (e.g. for hospitals, schools, prisons)	1.77	64.1%	17.6%	8.4%	3.7%	1.8%	2.3%	2.1%
I would order more locally produced foods in restaurants if menu items were clearly marked as locally grown	1.86	54.8%	24.4%	10.5%	5.3%	2.1%	1.2%	1.8%

Responses were on a seven point scale with 1 = Strongly agree to 7 = Strongly disagree.

Seven-tenths of survey respondents strongly agreed that the government should promote buying locally grown food. Slightly fewer, but still far more than half, strongly agreed that the government should promote the institutional purchasing of locally grown food. Just over half of all survey

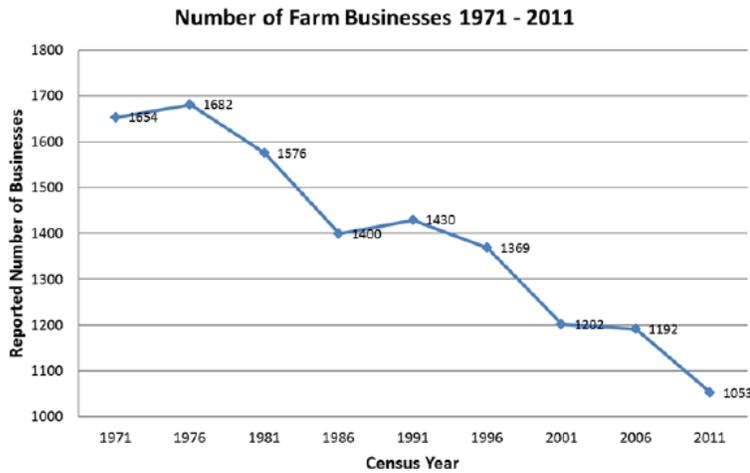
respondents strongly agreed that they would order more locally produced foods in restaurants if they were clearly marked on menus.

What Would Make You More Likely to Purchase and Consume Local Foods?

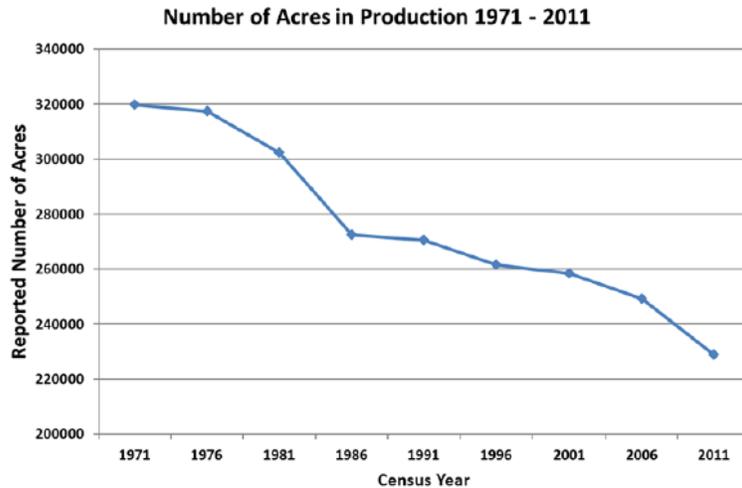


The top five things that would make respondents more likely to purchase local foods are: 1) availability in local stores, 2) wider availability of frozen products in winter, 3) wider availability in big box stores or large grocery chains, 4) lower prices, and 5) clearer, more specific labelling.

Why is this information important and topical for today?



Prepared by Farms at Work



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- as stated earlier and as shown by the above graph, there has been significant decreases in the number of local farm businesses in Peterborough County.
- 91,000 acres lost in 40 years (28% of farmed land)
- Equivalent to losing more than 900 family farms of 100 acres
- Rate of loss is increasing

Food Growing Land Summary

An Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) study ("Farmland Requirements for Ontario's Growing Population: 2010 to 2036" by Charlotte McCallum, PhD) sought to determine how much agricultural land would be required to grow food for Ontario's population from 2010 to 2036. The Report found that, although Ontario had the ability to be self-sufficient in 2010, it was nearing its capacity for self-sufficiency in food production. By 2036, based on population projections, there would be a deficit of more than two million acres.

Sustainable Peterborough's Working Group on the Future of Food and Farming recently used the OFT methodology in a preliminary study of the County's ability to feed itself. Applying the OFT Report's calculated agricultural land needs per capita to Peterborough County and City (assuming dietary needs of County/City are same as provincial average), the County has more than enough land in agricultural production to theoretically sustain the population of both the County and City to 2036 (surplus of 60,000 acres in 2011 and 34,000 in 2036).

The County currently has excess production in cereal products and in dairy, meat and alternatives compared to the population's 2011 needs and production will continue to show a surplus in those categories in 2036.

However, **preliminary analysis shows that we need many more acres of production in fruits and vegetables in the County, and that by 2036 the gap will be even more profound.**

Moreover, the results make the assumption that as much land will be in production in 2036 as is currently being farmed. Based on historical trends, this is highly unlikely, as 20,000 acres were lost in just 5 years between 2006 and 2011. Further, stakeholders at the March 20 meeting were quick to point out that Peterborough County's obligations to grow food would extend beyond our own borders, given our proximity to the GTA. Neither of these factors is considered in the preliminary calculations performed by the Working Group.

Further work is planned to refine the numbers, which will be made widely available.

Next Steps

The Peterborough Social Planning Council in partnership with Farms at Work held **"The Future of Food & Farming Summit"**, on October 11, 2012, at Peterborough's Market Hall. The goal of the session was to increase awareness of the links between food, health, community economic development, food security and farming within the context of planning for the future of Peterborough County.

Twenty-seven community leaders attended, from non-profit and government interests, to farmers and others throughout the value chain of local food system. Another dozen invitees were unable to participate but asked to be kept on the list of interested parties and to receive the proceedings. A working group was established as a result of the summit. The Future of Food & Farming Working Group is now supporting Sustainable Peterborough's action plan on food and agriculture and is comprised of:

- Dawn Berry-Merriam, Peterborough Social Planning Council
- Pat Learmonth, Farms at Work
- Karen Jopling, Greater Peterborough Area Economic Development Corporation
- Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Peterborough County-City Health Unit
- Brad Appleby, Planner, City of Peterborough
- Ian Clendening, Planner, County of Peterborough
- William Astell, resident and farmer, retired
- Linda Slavin, Sustainable Peterborough
- Judy Coward, Ontario Ministry of Agricultural and Food (ex officio)

Specifically, Sustainable Peterborough is committed to the following:

Mission & Goal Statement for the Food & Farming Working Group: Consensus to build on the goal and mission of Sustainable Peterborough as follows:

The Goal of Sustainable Peterborough: We will feed ourselves sustainably with local, healthy foods.

How Are We Going to Get There? By following our *Strategic Directions*:

- Maintain adequate farmland availability to support our sustainable agricultural needs
- Facilitate the production, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of local, healthy food
- Encourage farmers to practice good environmental stewardship.

This working group is supporting Sustainable Peterborough's food and agriculture pillar of its plan. The 3 priority areas that the group is currently addressing are: food literacy, land use and access to local foods.

For more information about our InfoNotes contact: Dawn Berry Merriam at 705-743-5915 or email dawnbm@pspc.on.ca.

