



LOCAL FOOD ACTION PLAN

SETTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD IN NIAGARA



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of Actions	2
Background.....	4
How is Local Food Defined?	5
Notes to Reader	5
Defining the Region’s Role	7
How can I get involved?	7
What’s Next?.....	7
Action Items	8
Information Resources and Research	8
Information Resources	8
Research	9
Local Food Network and Infrastructure	11
Local Food Network and Transportation.....	11
Processing Infrastructure	12
Distribution Infrastructure.....	13
Education and Awareness Raising	14
Education of Consumers.....	14
Education of Producers.....	17
Marketing and Promotion.....	18
Supportive Policy and Funding.....	20
Supportive Policies.....	20
Funding Support.....	23

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

SECTION 1: INFORMATION RESOURCES AND RESEARCH

Information Resources

Action1A: Compile information database of producers, processors, and distributors to define the local food network in Niagara.

Action1B: Compile and provide a comprehensive listing of information on availability and seasonality of local food products.

Research

Action 1C: Research and provide information/programs for long-term financial viability of local food production and processing.

Action 1D: Research, compile, and provide advice on crop yields, seasonality, new products and needs of market for producers.

SECTION 2: LOCAL FOOD NETWORK AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Local Food Network

Action 2A: Assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths of the local food network in Niagara and work to improve the existing condition.

Processing Infrastructure

Action 2B: Assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and strengths of processing local food in Niagara and work to improve existing conditions.

Distribution Infrastructure

Action 2C: Investigate expansion of existing distribution outlets and the feasibility for a Niagara Distribution Centre for local food products.

Action 2D: Increase consumer access to local food products.

SECTION 3: EDUCATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

Community Education

Action 3A: Educate consumers about local food products - how to find, grow or prepare them and where to purchase.

Action 3B: Educate future consumers through school programs.

Action 3C: Research, compile and provide information on social and physical health benefits of local food.

Education of Producers

Action 3D: Educate producers about the changing needs/desires of the market, and other means and methods of farming.

Action 3E: Educate and offer opportunities for future producers through training, apprenticeships, and incentives.

Marketing and Promotion

Action 3F: Coordinate and promote local food related festivals and events.

Action 3G: Create a comprehensive marketing campaign surrounding the promotion of Niagara local food products. The target audience would be both within and outside Niagara.

SECTION 4: SUPPORTIVE POLICY AND FUNDING

Supportive Policies

Action 4A: Commit to buying local products as part of purchasing policy of institutions and businesses.

Action 4B: Review and refine policies or practices (where possible) that hinder the production, processing or distribution of local food.

Action 4C: Support and promote local food efforts in Niagara through the creation of a comprehensive plan or strategy.

Funding Support

Action 4D: Review and refine tax policies to encourage the production, processing and distribution of local food in Niagara.

Action 4E: Develop, offer and promote financial programs for producers and processors.

BACKGROUND

Recent food scares, agriculturally-related plant closures, environmental consciousness raising and rising transportation costs have all contributed to making local food a popular topic in the news. In Niagara, the closure of the Cadbury-Schweppes juice plant (2007) and the CanGro Canning Factory (2008) have been of particular concern for many producers and the community.

In April 2008, Niagara Regional Council passed a motion to buy local food products. In July they passed a report that set out to facilitate the creation of a Local Food Action Plan Work Program that included hosting a Forum to gather information. This Forum was held, in partnership with the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, on August 14th in Jordan to gather ideas from producers, distributors, processors, institutions, consumers, and government agencies to gain a better understanding of what was needed in Niagara.

The Region has received a great deal of input, support and encouragement regarding the creation of a Local Food Action Plan. What has been overwhelming from this support is that so many of us realize the bounty of products and experiences we have to offer in Niagara, but few of us are clear on how to act on those ideas in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

This Local Food Action Plan is based on a significant amount of research and input (much of this background material can be found on the Region's website, or that of our many stakeholders). The intent is to outline actions that need to be taken to support, enhance, and promote our local food products to ourselves, our neighbours and beyond.

The definition of these action items is a significant step; however it is only the beginning of a larger journey. This journey will take creativity, cooperation, communication, and coordination of many stakeholders in order to be implemented and successful.

How is Local Food Defined?

Before any true discussion can be furthered, it is beneficial to explain what is meant by the term local food.

At the Forum and a number of agricultural fairs, we asked participants to define what local food meant to them from a list of three choices. The choices were:

- the geographic boundaries of Niagara Region;
- the one hundred mile diet distance that includes areas such as Toronto and Buffalo; or
- Ontario and/or Canada.

Not surprisingly, local food means something different to everyone and no clear consensus could be reached.

This means that the Local Food Action Plan should recognize our locale, neighbours and citizenship. To do this best, it is intended that this Plan will consider actions internal to Niagara and those external.

NOTES TO THE READER

Each action can be found in a chart similar to the one below. This description is meant to help the reader understand the various components of each action.

Action 8A:	
Description:	
Suggested Tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	Already in place / progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none">•
Who:	
Timing:	
Priority:	
Difficulty:	

Action number: This number is for reference purposes, and the actions are placed in an order for ease of understanding. Priority is not indicated by this number.

Action: This is the ONLY component of the charts that are not expected to change significantly, and are to be approved by Regional Council. The rest of the chart is meant to clarify the actions and identify tasks that will help in implementation.

Description: This is a general description that is meant to help explain the action.

Suggested tasks: These are examples of things that could be done to help in fulfilling the actions. As further information is gathered these tasks may change.

Already in place / progress: These are examples of known activities in place, or those that have been submitted. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Who: These are suggested stakeholders that might be involved in carrying out the tasks listed. Further discussions will be required to better understand who is able and willing to take a leadership role in carrying out specific tasks related to the actions.

Timing: This is the minimum estimated time that might be expected to complete many of the tasks listed, however some actions may be dependent on others being completed or began.

Short – Less than 3 months

Medium – Between 3 and 6 months

Long - 6 months or longer

Priority: This is based upon relative priority given at the Local Food Action Forum. Priority of actions may change over time.

Low – Less than 50 points

Medium – Between 50 and 100 points

High – Above 100 points

Difficulty: This is the estimated level of difficulty in achieving many of the tasks listed.

Easy – Involves compilation of existing information

Medium – Includes research, minor funding or capacity raising

Difficult – Involves major funding, infrastructure

DEFINING THE REGION'S ROLE

The Region has been supporting agriculture in Niagara since the early 1970s through various means such as strong urban area boundary policies meant to preserve agricultural lands, or the establishment of the Agricultural Sub-Committee or Agricultural Task Force that provides advice to Council on agricultural issues.

The Local Food Action Plan is yet another supportive initiative. The progress will be under the guidance of the Agricultural Task Force, with direction from a Local Food specific group(s). Overall it is intended that the Region act in a leadership capacity to coordinate and facilitate a diverse group of stakeholders to communicate and work together to implement and make the actions come to fruition. There are some tasks, however that the Region can work on as well, such as supportive policy.

Further, it is expected that the Region, in consultation with stakeholders, will refine components of the Action Plan by clarifying measures to track performance on the tasks, and providing updates on progress.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

An action plan can only be successful if it is implemented. No one person or group can be solely responsible for implementing all of these actions – it will require the

cooperation and continued effort of the entire community.

We encourage and welcome your participation on moving any of these actions forward, be it a small effort or large. We ask, however, that your participation on any of the tasks be communicated back to act as inspiration and ideas for others, ensure that efforts are not duplicated, and create potential partnerships.

If you have any ideas throughout this process, or want to share your progress, please send your feedback to: localfood@niagararegion.ca

WHAT'S NEXT?

The creation of the Local Food Action Plan is really just the beginning of supporting the production, processing, distribution and consumption of Niagara products. The Plan will be presented to Regional Council for approval of the actions proposed.

If successful, the Action Plan will be 'launched' and further discussion and clarification of the suggested tasks will be required. Initial wins can be gained on some tasks, while others will take more time. Ongoing performance measures will also need to be created and monitored to ensure we are achieving our intended results.

SECTION 1: INFORMATION RESOURCES AND RESEARCH

The following actions form some of the building blocks for many of the actions under other categories. These essential building blocks provide a common understanding of the issues and can be furthered and enhanced as needs arise.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Action 1A: Compile information database of producers, processors, and distributors to define the local food network in Niagara.	
Description: This is an essential building block from which many of the other actions will benefit. Having a current and comprehensive listing of all producers, processors, and distributors will also help uncover strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the sector.	
Suggested Tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect existing lists from a variety of sources to create a comprehensive list of all commodities sold/produced in Niagara • Gather additional information as required – e.g. product listing, location, where sold / purchased through a survey • Map information in GIS database • Coordinate to ensure information is kept up to date via self-service model • Coordinate with marketing efforts • Create an specialty (e.g. organic) accessibility database 	Already in place / progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various groups have lists of members, affiliates, contacts, etc. • Organic farmer directory map created – Niagara Agritourism
Who: Commodity Groups, Agricultural Associations, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Agricultural Task Force, Agricultural Tourism Centre, Municipal Business Directories, Marketers, Tourism Promoters, Niagara Culinary Trail	
Timing: Short – Long (upkeep)	
Priority: Low	
Difficulty: Easy	

Action 1B: Compile and provide a comprehensive listing of information on availability and seasonality of local food products.

Description: This listing would primarily be web-based and target the consumer. This resource would provide specific information regarding what products are available in Niagara and their seasonality.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile existing lists of product availability and seasonality • Prepare into user-friendly format • Distribute list via web / publications / maps in association with marketing efforts 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foodland Ontario, as well as some commodity websites, have some general information • Niagara Culinary Trail maps
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Who: Commodity Groups, Agricultural Associations, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (VRIC), Agricultural Task Force, Agricultural Tourism Centre, Marketers, Tourism Promoters

Timing: Short

Priority: Low

Difficulty: Easy

RESEARCH

Action 1C: Research and provide information/programs for long-term financial viability of local food production and processing.

Description: The long-term financial viability of producers and processors was a real concern for many respondents. Suggestions for how to do this ranged from examining free trade issues, to increasing prices for local food, however it was evident that more research needs to be done.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review literature for strategies used elsewhere to promote financial viability • Assess current production model and suggest efficiencies • Review import / export policies • Compile information and verify if it could be done with existing laws / policies • Consult with agricultural community regarding additional ideas, acceptability of suggestions and evaluate • Work with governments / organizations who can make suggestions become a reality 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orchard and Vineyards Transition Program through VRIC
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Who: Educators, Brock University, Niagara College, Agricultural Task Force, agricultural community, Niagara Culinary Trail, Province of Ontario, Government of Canada
Timing: Medium – Long
Priority: Medium
Difficulty: Medium – Difficult

Action 1D: Research, compile, and provide advice on crop yields, seasonality, new products and current market for producers.

Description: New food products and practices develop each season. It is difficult for producers to keep pace with all of the information they need to make the best choices for their local growing conditions, while increasing productivity, and meeting the needs of the market. This will also help new producers, or those looking to change their crops.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish linkages for producers looking for information on crop yields, seasonality and specific requirements to agencies / groups with available advice • Coordinate with research facilities, seed companies and agricultural commodity groups to gather this information in a self-service format • Provide information on crop rotation or complimentary products • Research market desires to provide advice to producers 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VRIC, seed companies and commodity groups provide information and research to producers
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Who: Agricultural Task Force, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Seed Companies, Agricultural Commodity Groups, Producers, Local Food Field Representatives, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), University of Guelph
Timing: Medium – Long
Priority: High
Difficulty: Medium

SECTION 2: LOCAL FOOD NETWORK AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The local food network entails the connections between the physical infrastructure of farms, fields, warehouses, stores, markets, etc.; the partnerships and relationships that have developed or opportunities that could be realized. The actions included in this section deal with both those relationships and the physical infrastructure and the ways it can be strengthened.

LOCAL FOOD NETWORK

Action 2A: Assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the local food network in Niagara and work to improve the existing condition.

Description: After identifying the local food network in Niagara, respondents stressed the need for an adequate assessment of how the infrastructure components work together, and how products are transported.

Suggested Tasks:

- Provide an outlet for partnership opportunities to form between producers, processors, distributors and enablers within the system
- Gather producers, processors, and distributors together to identify gaps and opportunities
- Prepare a local food network business plan
- Review transportation network between components and provide opportunities for grouping, pickup and delivery
- Strengthen transportation linkages / infrastructure where needed
- Investigate and provide information regarding shipping to the United States
- Work with grocery stores to make local food more accessible and convenient
- Create local food stores
- Investigate possibility of a local food auction or offering on websites like kijiji
- Maximize use of farmers markets
- Review and revise practices to ensure convenience from producers through to consumers

Already in place / progress:

- Orchard and Vineyards Transition Program through VRIC
- Local Food Plus – mechanism for producers, processors and distributors
- New web-based Niagara Local Food Coop created

Who: Producers, processors, distributors, Agricultural Task Force, transporters (rail, ship, air, truck), Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, agricultural associations, Local Food Plus, coops,

Timing: Medium – Long
Priority: High
Difficulty: Medium – Hard

PROCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE

Action 2B: Assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to processing local food in Niagara and work to improve existing conditions.

Description: Stakeholders indicated that information is needed on processing local food and what can be done to improve the existing situation.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate possibility for processing cooperatives and invest in, if feasible • Provide access for small producers to processing plants • Create commercial kitchens for use by small processors, consumers and urban gardeners • Discuss with existing processors the issues and opportunities available and act upon them • Investigate and provide information on new processing methods • Monitor processing facilities that are in danger of closing and look for possibilities of continuation • Investigate new or different packaging methods to extend shelf life / be more environmentally conscious 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
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Who: Processors, producers, Agricultural Task Force, consumers, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, banks, Brock University, Niagara College, investment companies, health professionals, Niagara Culinary Trail, various enablers in processing

Timing: Medium – Long

Priority: Medium

Difficulty: Medium

DISTRIBUTION INFRASTRUCTURE

Action 2C: Investigate expansion of existing distribution outlets and the feasibility for a Niagara Distribution Centre for local food products.

Description: Respondents expressed a need for greater distribution infrastructure and suggested the creation of a central Niagara Distribution Centre that would be accessible to all producers and processors.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather distributors, processors, and producers and clarify specific needs, goals and weaknesses with existing distribution infrastructure Investigate and analyze capacity of existing producer-based co-ops and distribution centres Provide capacity building information, funding, etc for existing co-ops to expand Investigate feasibility of a central Niagara Distribution Centre and establish if feasible Investigate funding opportunities for Distribution Centre creation / feasibility study 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vineland Growers Co-op
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Who: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Niagara Region, local municipalities, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Agricultural Task Force, distributors, producers, processors, Province of Ontario

Timing: Short – Long

Priority: High

Difficulty: Medium – Difficult

Action 2D: Increase consumer access to local food products.

Description: Many consumers have indicated their interest and support for purchasing more local food products, however they have also noted some of the difficulties, and possible changes that could make it more convenient to purchase.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate and analyze capacity of existing consumer-oriented co-ops, grocery outlets and farmers markets Investigate feasibility and potential of a central farmers market Investigate possibility of better identification of 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm Share Canada working with Ontario Association of Food Banks Smaller co-ops (e.g. Niagara Local Food
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<p>local products in grocery outlets, such as a specific areas dedicated to local products or signage to increase consumer awareness in connection with marketing efforts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community gardens and donation programs to ensure fresh local products are available to all • 	Coop)
<p>Who: grocery outlets, co-ops, farmers markets, Niagara Region, local municipalities, Agricultural Task Force, distributors, producers, processors, Province of Ontario, Farm Share Canada, food banks, community gardens, charitable organizations, consumers</p>	
<p>Timing: Short – Long</p>	
<p>Priority: High</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium – Difficult</p>	

SECTION 3: EDUCATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

Local food issues are complex. There is a great deal of information available, but it can be very confusing and difficult to find. The actions included within this category will try to educate and inform the community, while also promoting Niagara products.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Action 3A: Educate consumers about local food products - how to find, grow or prepare them and where to purchase.

Description: General information for consumers may assist and explain the basics about local food such as what to look for when purchasing or picking, the various symbols used to designate local, how to prepare items with recipes, or how to grow them.

Suggested Tasks:

- Compile existing information on a variety of local food products
- Provide list of links for additional information
- Establish or support community gardens
- Promote urban gardening efforts
- Offer courses to educate consumers or compile

Already in place / progress:

- Various agricultural and tourism sites feature certain products or information e.g. Niagara Culinary Trail, Fruit and Vegetable Marketing

<p>listing of existing courses offered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide displays at local fairs and events • Feature taste tests of local products versus imported • Provide recipes, safe food preparation, preservation and storage at home methods, and nutrition information on local food items • Offer information of cultural preparations of different foods • Establish a consumer education program, possibly with Brock University or Niagara College 	<p>Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy eating presentations, food demonstrations & canning workshops provided by Community Food Advisors • Niagara Info Dine • Safe food handler courses offered by Niagara Region Public Health
<p>Who: Agricultural organizations, Federations of Agriculture, Agricultural Task Force, Niagara College, Brock University, restaurateurs, producers, distributors, registered dietitians, community garden operators, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Province of Ontario, multi-cultural groups, food banks, Niagara Region</p>	
<p>Timing: Medium</p>	
<p>Priority: High</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium</p>	

Action 3B: Educate future consumers through school programs.

Description: Educating the young on local food may have many benefits, such as introducing farming as a future career choice, explaining where food comes from, learning how to make healthy food choices including local foods and discovering the business of production.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish co-op opportunities within production / processing operations and advertise to schools (secondary and post) • Introduce or enrich school programs to feature local foods (e.g. meal & snack programs, vending machines, cafeterias, etc.) • Include local food in units and courses throughout the school system • Offer school trips to local food producers / processors • Establish school gardens • Compile teacher strategies and resources by grade to help facilitate inclusion in classes • Work with schools to develop local food days 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers try to include local food topics in their classes • 4H programs • Niagara Region Public Health support, educate and promote healthy food choices in schools
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Who: School boards, Brock University, Niagara College, teachers, principals, Ministry of Education, producers, processors, Agricultural Task Force, Niagara Region, Niagara Nutrition Partners
Timing: Medium – Long
Priority: Medium
Difficulty: Medium

Action 3C: Research, compile and provide information on social and physical health benefits of local food.

Description: Health is increasingly becoming a concern of the community, be it the cleanliness of our environment, or the nutritional quality and safety of the food we eat. Having a centralized location for information on the health benefits of choosing local food may help consumers make choices as to how they spend their food dollars. Included within this topic should be references to local food security.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate a group of health advocates to provide information / links on the health benefits of local food • Research / compile information on social, cultural, ecological and economic benefits (e.g. environmental sustainability) • Research / compile information on food security and safety • Demonstrate distances traveled for a typical meal and the implications • Compile information and distribute through marketing campaign / web / classrooms / publications 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Eating resources available through Niagara Region Public Health and others
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Who: Niagara Health System, doctors, registered dietitians, Niagara Region Public Health, social services advocates, educators, Brock University, Niagara College, tourism promoters, Agricultural Task Force, Foodland Ontario, commodity groups, school boards, environmentalists

Timing: Short – Medium
Priority: Low
Difficulty: Easy – Medium

EDUCATION OF PRODUCERS

Action 3D: Educate producers about the changing needs/desires of the market, and other means and methods of farming.

Description: According to information expressed by stakeholders, unless they are a large operation, producers are often too busy to also act as processors, distributors and marketers of their product. By providing information and educational opportunities for producers they can focus on their products, change practices, or learn efficiencies that will assist in their productivity or financial position.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and compile suggested prices for local food products Compile information on packaging and ways to market through the look of the product Research and provide information on diverse needs / desires based on cultural differences / tastes Provide advice forum from producers to others Offer opportunities for partnerships between producers that provide cross-benefits Provide alternatives for retiring farmers – mentorships, buy outs, etc. Profile organic or other methods of farming as alternatives 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing Your Opportunities Workshop being planned VRIC’s website for horticultural crops
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Who: Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Agricultural Task Force, organic groups, commodity groups, marketers, distributors, research organizations, Brock University, Niagara College, Province of Ontario

Timing: Medium – Long

Priority: High

Difficulty: Medium

Action 3E: Educate and offer opportunities for future producers through training, apprenticeships, and incentives.

Description: Fewer young people are getting into food production. Often there is not an opportunity for them to learn, or it is not thought of as a satisfying and fulfilling career move. With help, these preconceived ideas can change and opportunities will be created.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile and provide information about production / processing as a career choice 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Niagara College Culinary School,
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide incentives for young farmers to start out • Provide educational assistance through apprenticeships, co-ops, training programs • Expand available course offerings to teach about products or processing • Link young farmers with a mentor (re: Big Brothers / Big Sisters program) 	<p>Niagara Parks Commission, greenhouses, and viticulture courses / certificates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brock University Viticulture and Oenology program
<p>Who: producers, processors, agricultural groups, Agricultural Task Force, Province of Ontario, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Niagara College, Brock University, Niagara Parks Commission, school boards</p>	
<p>Timing: Medium – Long</p>	
<p>Priority: Low</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium</p>	

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Action 3F: Coordinate and promote local food-related festivals and events.

Description: Many festivals and events featuring local food are planned in Niagara each year, yet respondents expressed concern there was little coordination or cross-promotion between them. By working together, all festivals and events could be more successful.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile information on existing festivals and events – e.g. date, location, focus, size, etc. • Suggest additional festivals or possible changes (e.g. summer / winter-licious festivals, fall harvest festival, Blossom Sunday) • Create a festival coordination group • Demonstrate local cooking / items at all festivals • Cross-promote between festivals • Coordinate with tourism / marketing efforts 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many existing festivals – e.g. Wine Festival, Poultry Fest • Seasons magazine • Municipal websites including local festivals • Culture Committee has compiled a basic listing of names of festivals and is creating a Culture Plan that will discuss all festivals
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Who: Agricultural Task Force, Culture Committee, culinary experts, festival organizers, marketers, tourism promoters

Timing: Medium – Long

Priority: Low

Difficulty: Medium

Action 3G: Create a comprehensive marketing campaign surrounding the promotion of Niagara local food products. The target audience would be both within and outside Niagara.

Description: Respondents suggested that Niagara products lack a definable image, logo or slogan to allow consumers to know and understand a Niagara product from elsewhere. Having this might promote a distinctive Niagara brand renowned for quality and taste. To be successful, however, it will be important to coordinate with existing branding strategies to expand reach while marketing Niagara products.

Suggested Tasks:

- Create an easily recognizable Niagara brand that can be used for all Niagara food products
- Spread the word through a variety of mediums e.g. on buses / bus stops / benches, fridge magnets, newspapers, radio, web
- Create road shows to sell the Niagara brand outside of Niagara
- Profile Niagara producers and processors to allow the consumer to bond
- Create a face of Niagara products
- Coordinate with tourism marketing
- Use branding on Niagara products for consistency
- Market the development of unique local products
- Media to run special features about local food – where to get it, pick it, etc.
- Ensure promotion of local products continues throughout the year
- Compile list of existing local food tours and expand or establish tours
- Create standards that are attached to a brand / labeling system
- Compile a list of existing logos and branding strategies used in Niagara
- Coordinate with these groups to cross promote the Niagara brand with these other initiatives
- Utilize and model activities after existing successful strategies e.g. VQA, maps, Culinary Trail

Already in place / progress:

- Niagara Economic Development Corporation has recently developed a 'niagara original' brand that could be further developed for all commodity items
- Various organizations / groups advertising specific commodities e.g. 'got milk?'
- Specific tours offered – Wine Routes, Niagara Culinary Trail
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with distributors to successfully market brands 	
<p>Who: Agricultural Task Force, Niagara Region, economic development corporations and departments, producers, commodity groups and associations, chefs, newspapers, television stations, webhosters, newsletter writers, radio stations, marketers, tourism promoters, tour coordinators, recreation enthusiasts, Chambers of Commerce, producers, processors, distributors, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Brock University, Niagara College, consumers, transportation authorities, Foodland Ontario, Wine Council of Ontario, Niagara Culinary Trail</p>	
<p>Timing: Medium – Long</p>	
<p>Priority: High</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium</p>	

SECTION 4: SUPPORTIVE POLICY AND FUNDING

On the surface we can all agree to support local food efforts, however there are policies, practices or procedures that sometimes get in the way of our objectives. The following actions ask for a concerted effort from everyone - including all levels of government and their agencies/boards/etc., businesses, and groups and associations – to look below the surface and embrace change.

SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

Action 4A: Commit to buying local products as part of the purchasing policy of institutions and businesses.

Description: Many institutions, and even large corporations, purchase significant quantities of food for their residents, guests, employees, customers, inmates, and students. If all of these businesses and institutions made a commitment to purchase local food as part of their purchasing strategy, there would be a large market for local products.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate costs and benefits of purchasing local products as part of food purchasing budget • Commit to purchasing certain products or a percentage of food purchases locally through policy and practice • Work with any existing food service 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Niagara Region has a pilot program to purchase local foods in their Child Care Centres • Institutional sector purchasing leads have discussed options
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<p>organizations to increase their purchase of local products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature local food in prepared meals, cafeterias, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many restaurants feature local food items on their menus
<p>Who: Brock University, Niagara College, Niagara Region, local municipalities, banquet halls, convention centres, hotels, bed and breakfasts, correctional facilities, seniors homes, child care centres, school boards, businesses, distributors, producers, processors, Local Food Plus, restaurants, hospitals</p>	
<p>Timing: Short – Long</p>	
<p>Priority: Low</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium</p>	

Action 4B: Review and refine policies or practices (where possible) that hinder the production, processing or distribution of local food.

Description: Respondents indicated that some policies and practices of governments or their agencies may be outdated, or support other objectives while hindering local food efforts. These policies may include those of the Federal, Provincial, Niagara Regional and Local governments, as well as agencies such as the Conservation Authority. At some times a compromise or equally beneficial solution should be created to further one or more objectives.

<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise policies regarding value-added on farms • Review approvals process and remove 'red tape' where possible • Ensure urban / rural conflicts do not arise through policy approaches • Provide security that lands will continue in agricultural production • Encourage urban agricultural use through policy such as using empty undevelopable lots or old school sites • Discuss with producers, processors and distributors policies or practices that pose particular problems and attempt to explain or refine process / policy • Review 'problem areas', propose solutions, and work with corresponding governments / agencies to correct issues 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-added policies on farms under review at Niagara Region • Directions of Agricultural Action Plan • Niagara Water Quality Protection Strategy actions such as Watershed Plans, stewardship efforts or rural water quality cost-share programs delivered by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide 'how to' resources for producers / processors / distributors to explain and /or navigate 'the system' • Ensure new policies / practices do not hinder the production / processing of local food • Ensure labeling of products clearly indicate local content (e.g. VQA standards) 	
<p>Who: Agricultural Task Force, Government of Canada, Province of Ontario, Niagara Region, local municipalities, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, producers, agricultural groups and associations, processors, distributors, economic development, realtors, Wine Council of Ontario</p>	
<p>Timing: Medium – Long</p>	
<p>Priority: High</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium – Difficult</p>	

Action 4C: Support and promote local food efforts in Niagara through the creation of a comprehensive plan or strategy.

<p>Description: Many participants expressed a need for having a coordinated and comprehensive local food strategy in Niagara that meets the needs of various stakeholders, but helps eliminate conflict and duplication.</p>	
<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete, with advice from various stakeholders, a comprehensive local food plan that supports and promotes agricultural sustainability • Secure institutional support for the local food plan • Create a centralized body to lead efforts and gather support • Promote the comprehensive plan and get buy-in from stakeholders • Designate necessary resources to provide leadership and to implement Action Plan 	<p>Already in place / progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Food Forum held August 14th to gather input and direction • Stakeholders submitted ideas through email address
<p>Who: Agricultural Task Force, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Niagara Region, local municipalities, Province of Ontario, producers, consumers, distributors, consumers</p>	
<p>Timing: Medium – Long</p>	

Priority: High
Difficulty: Medium

FUNDING SUPPORT

Action 4D: Review and refine tax policies to encourage the production, processing and distribution of local food in Niagara.	
Description: Respondents expressed concern about some existing tax policies that inhibit the production and processing of local food products.	
Suggested Tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather producers and processors to discuss policies / practices regarding items such as industry tax classes and phase-in opportunities • Review and revise tax policies where possible at the Niagara Regional and local levels • Contact Province of Ontario and discuss possible changes that could be made 	Already in place / progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Charge Review consistent with directions of Agricultural Action Plan (2006) • Discussions as part of Value Added Study
Who: Niagara Region, local municipalities, Province of Ontario, producers, processors, distributors, agricultural associations, Municipal Property Assessment Corporation	
Timing: Medium	
Priority: Low	
Difficulty: Medium	

Action 4E: Develop, offer and promote financial programs for producers and processors.	
Description: A number of respondents indicated that there needs to be an increased number of financial programs to assist producers and processors. For example, starting out, expanding, diversifying or using new technologies can take a significant infusion of capital.	
Suggested Tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather producers, processors, banks, investment companies, and municipalities together to discuss possible options available now, what could be done and what is needed • Offer tax incentives or development incentives to offset initial costs of infrastructure, based on 	Already in place / progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smarter Niagara Incentives for urban renewal

<p>new job creation, or to promote green initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide low interest loans • Offer application fee reductions • Invest in partnership arrangements for shared use of equipment, processing facilities, etc. 	
<p>Who: Banks, mortgage brokers, investment companies, Niagara Region, Province of Ontario, Government of Canada, local municipalities, economic development corporations and departments, producers, processors, Agricultural Task Force</p>	
<p>Timing: Medium – Long</p>	
<p>Priority: High</p>	
<p>Difficulty: Medium</p>	