



Niagara Region

Building Community. Building Lives.

Agri-Food Strategy



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Niagara Region

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of this project involve identifying key priorities, including those that can be realistically acted upon, to support the agriculture and food sectors of Niagara. This strategy intends to build on the success of previous agricultural and local food strategies, policies, and initiatives, and to help guide the actions and priorities of the Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (APAC) through the next Council term. Lastly, this project is intended to enhance community collaboration opportunities and to demonstrate leadership through innovative thinking and actions.



Niagara Region

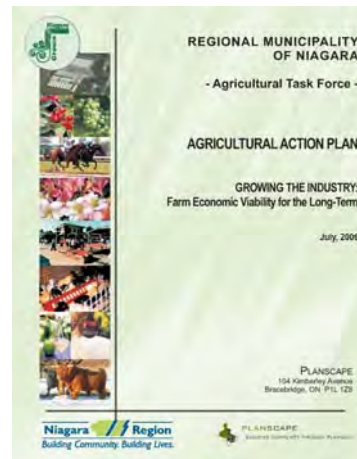
ACHIEVEMENTS FROM 2006 PLAN

- Vineland Research and Innovation Centre has been reborn as a world renowned research centre focused on a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable horticultural industry driven by innovation.
- The Region's value added policies have set the standard for innovative policies and have been adopted by the Province as a model for the recently updated **Provincial Policy Statement 2014**
- Small and medium scale processing, including wine production and production of value-added floricultural products, is thriving.
- New craft breweries and distilleries are adding to Niagara's reputation for innovation and entrepreneurship, and as a major producer of beverages.
- The Greenbelt has effectively protected the land base and Niagara's reputation for producing high end agri-food products continues to grow.
- Regional focus on economic development supporting agricultural sector.



ITEMS NOT ACHIEVED OR ONGOING

- Rationalization of regulatory process to improve efficiency and remove redundancies
- Effective funding mechanisms for agriculturally related programs
- Provincial funding of farm tax rebate program
- Task force to address farm related taxation issues
- Expanding access to raw water for agriculture
- Agriculturally focused educational curriculum at the Province level
- Comprehensive buy local programs



AGRI-FOOD STRATEGY GOALS

- Establishing a data base of local food producers, processors and distributors;
- Identifying the regional local food network and infrastructure;
- Educating and raising public awareness about local food; and
- Implementing appropriate policies and programs to support it.



LOCAL FOOD ACTION PLAN
SETTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD IN NIAGARA



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WHY DO WE NEED AND UPDATE and EXPANDED STRATEGY



- Capitalize on growing global market for premium agri-food products
- Build on public demand for sustainable, healthy and productive communities
- Agriculture is a fundamental pillar of the Niagara economy. Estimates indicate primary agricultural production in Niagara has an annual economic impact on the regional economy of \$2.7 billion and generates or sustains 17,227 jobs
- Niagara is the largest producer of grapes, tender fruit and floriculture products in Ontario
- The Ontario agri-food cluster focused in the Golden Horseshoe is one of the largest in North America. Estimates of the economic impact of three of the primary components of the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster, input and service providers, primary agriculture and food and beverage processing exceed \$35 billion annually with potential to grow. Niagara is a significant component of this cluster.



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WHY DO WE NEED AND UPDATE and EXPANDED STRATEGY

- Niagara has the climate, land base, experienced operators, research capacity and skills to expand its position as a leader in the production of agri-food products
- With the implementation of the Greenbelt, Niagara’s unique agricultural land base, with the benevolent climate that supports it, is protected for productive use for future generations
- Premier’s challenge to agri-food sector – double its annual growth rate and create 120,000 jobs by the year 2020

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TIMELINE

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

November 2014

Meetings with:

- NAPAC
- Working Group

CONSULTATIONS

November & December

Meetings with:

- 3 Public Consultations
- Working Group

RESEARCH

Interviews with:

- Commodity Groups
- Educational Institutions
- Agri-food Reps

Meetings with:

- NAPAC
- Working Group

DRAFT STRATEGY

Working Sessions with:

- Working Group
- Regional & Local Staff
- NAPAC

PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETINGS

March 2015


2 Public Consultations

PRESENTED TO NAPAC

APRIL 2015

FINALIZE WORK PROGRAM

SEPT 2015



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MISSION

Support agri-food prosperity and sustainability

Protect the resource

Enable the productivity of the value chain while protecting resources for future use

Innovate to respond to growing global demand for high quality agri-food products and new technologies

Support profitable primary production as the anchor for sustainable value chain

Link all aspects of the regional agri-food sector to enhance opportunities

Promote opportunities arising from linking food, lifestyle and tourism

Capitalize on rapidly growing links being made between local food and public health

Leverage Regional resources to enhance productivity and increase competitiveness

Build on research and educational resources to support a broadly based, productive agri-food sector

Encourage growth by rationalizing regulation

VISION

Niagara is home to a broadly based, unique, innovative and progressive agri-food sector which is a pillar for economic prosperity and quality of life. Niagara Region leads in enabling the development, production and distribution of high quality agri-food products for local and global markets.

Guiding Principles

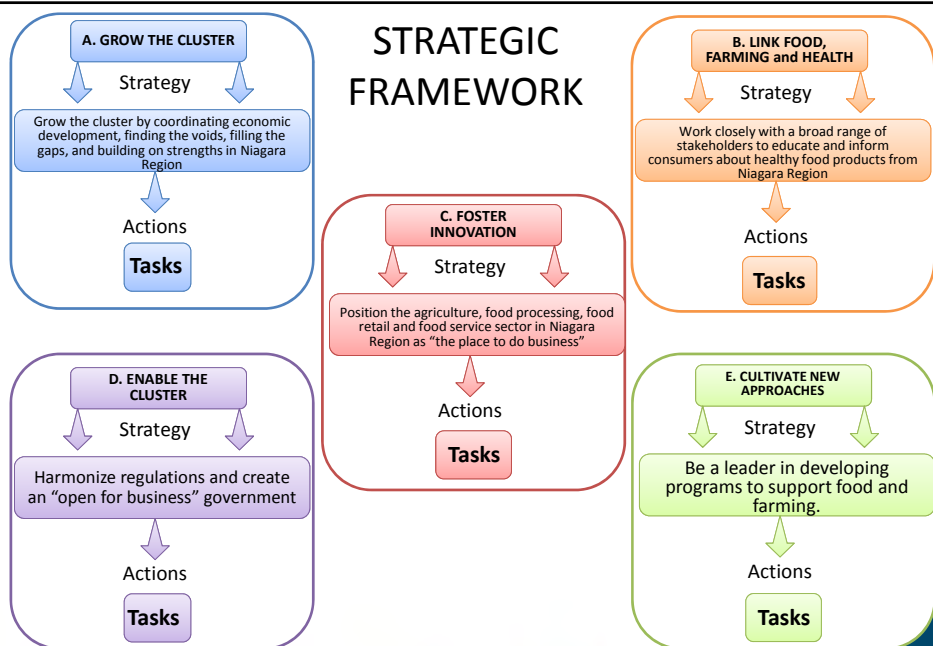
- Enhance productivity
- Focus on prosperity
- Be innovative and entrepreneurial
- Focus on products that serve growing markets
- Use manufacturing to add value to primary production
- Build for sustainable future
- Support health and quality of life
- Sustain the agri-food system

CHOOSING THE ACTIONS

1. Will it:
 - Support enhanced prosperity
 - Increase productivity
 - Innovate for value
 - Optimize flexibility
 - Protect and build existing resources
 - Contribute to well-being and quality of life
 - Be sustainable?
2. Can the Region make a difference?
3. How will success be measured?



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



ACTION 'A'

A – Grow the Cluster: Grow the cluster by coordinating economic development, finding the voids, filling the gaps, and building on strengths in Niagara Region.

Niagara with its unique land base and benevolent micro climate produces a broad range of agri-food products. Expanding the capacity to produce, process and distribute these products will sustain Regional prosperity and increase productivity. While there are specific opportunities to increase the market share held by local food within Niagara, such as through government-operated institutions that have discretion over what food they source, the big opportunity for market growth lies in sales made outside Niagara and outside Ontario. Wealthy consumers for high value food products are increasing in Asia.

Action 1

Establish and implement economic development and planning priorities including policies, programs and strategies to enable the agri-food value chain to prosper and to sustain individual agri-food businesses.

Action 2

Identify opportunities and support businesses to export Niagara products outside of Ontario

Action 3

Sustain an agri-food system where farms can operate profitability without conflict

ACTION 'B'

B – Link Food, Farming and Health: Work closely with a broad range of stakeholders to educate and inform consumers about healthy food products from Niagara Region.

Access to nutritious, safe and diverse foods contributes to a healthy and enjoyable life style. The Region can promote healthy living by connecting residents to local agri-food products, both for food and beverage consumption and, in case of ornamentals, for recreational purposes. Medical research shows that diets rich in fruits and vegetables contribute to health. Niagara is a leading producer of fruit in Canada and can use its strength to provide healthy products to consumers in Niagara and beyond.

Action 1

Promote local food and encourage local food literacy – foster a “choose local first” approach for agri-food products.

ACTION 'C'

C – Foster Innovation: Position the agriculture, food processing, food retail and food service sector in Niagara Region as “the place to do business”

The key to success in today's markets is innovation. As home to outstanding research institutions focused on bringing new products to markets, Niagara can lead in developing new and successful agri-food businesses. Innovation requires successful commercialization, moving the idea from discovery to action. That's where entrepreneurship comes in, with investors and hands-on 'doers' willing to take calculated risks and make things happen. Niagara can support entrepreneurs in managing risks and increasing the likelihood of successful innovations being introduced to the market. It can also serve attract young talent to the sector.

Action 1

Empower Institutions and entrepreneurs to develop and support opportunities in the agri-food sector.

Action 2

Support access to and facilitate introduction of new technologies including varietal introductions, growing systems, ways of storing and packaging, and of processing

ACTION 'D'

D – Enable the Agri-Food Cluster: Harmonize regulations and create an “open for business” government

Canada's reputation for producing safe, well regulated products is based on a comprehensive regulatory regime. While this world class regulatory regime is beneficial for trade and consumer confidence, the regulatory regime must also be flexible and efficient in order to allow businesses to thrive and have a predictable business environment in which to operate. Streamlining the regulatory regime to avoid duplication, conflict and overlapping jurisdiction can achieve increase its efficiency lowering its cost to government and its value to society.

Action 1

Build on the fact that agri-food is a leading economic engine in Niagara

Action 2

Reduce the burden on agri-food operators and bring more timeliness and certainty to approval processes while keeping the economy nimble and retaining the integrity of the regulator regime

ACTION 'E'

E – Cultivate New Approaches: Be a leader in developing programs to support food and farming.

Niagara is endowed with skills and resources that can be used to support and grow the agri-food sector. Identifying and implementing alternative models for doing business – such as achieving higher levels of collaboration leading to economies of scale and efficiencies in logistics – and linking related opportunities will capitalize on these resources. In the Ontario market, for example, Niagara grown fruit can be tree ripened, offering a competitive advantage over imported product that has a shipping cycle of several days, provided that the standards for removing field heat are rigorously followed to maintain top quality.

Action 1

Support value chain integration (manufacturing, servicing, processing) and opportunities to increase the value that is added to agri-food products in Niagara, extend their market reach and capitalize on synergies to reduce cost

Action 2

Foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Ensure regulation is flexible to allow new approaches to be implemented

IMPLEMENTATION

Where do we go from here



*The following slides outline potential tasks that could possibly implement the actions.
They are presented for discussion purposes.*

POTENTIAL TASK 'A'

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

A – Grow the Cluster: Grow the cluster by coordinating economic development, finding the voids, filling the gaps, and building on strengths in Niagara Region.

Action 1


Establish and implement economic development and planning priorities including policies, programs and strategies to enable the agri-food value chain to prosper and to sustain individual agri-food businesses.
Tasks
Participate in the reviews of provincial plans (Greenbelt, Growth Plan, and Niagara Escarpment Plan) to advocate for the interests of the agri-food sector with policy that recognizes and addresses the needs of agriculture (e.g. setback, hydrological feature mapping, etc.).
Maintain an up-to-date inventory of vacant industrial land appropriate for agri-food businesses, and market sites to agri-food industries for growth and expansion.
Identify creative uses for publicly owned land and facilities to support the agri-food sector. (Examples include permitting maple sap collection on public land, use of public facilities for farmers' markets).

Action 2

Identify opportunities and support businesses to export Niagara products outside of Ontario
Tasks
Work with existing export programs to develop a Niagara-themed focus on outbound international trade missions and incoming trade missions.
Implement policies that support a healthy and broadly based agri-tourism sector which does not conflict with production, using tourists to Niagara as potential ambassadors for Niagara products in their home countries.

Action 3

Sustain an agri-food system where farms can operate profitably without conflict
Tasks
Apply an "agriculture comes first" caveat conveyed by support material (signage, web sites etc.) for agricultural areas.
Expand existing on-farm value-added and agriculturally related use permissions to support the agri-food sector (Niagara specific land use policies).

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POTENTIAL TASK 'B'

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

B – Link Food, Farming and Health: Work closely with a broad range of stakeholders to educate and inform consumers about healthy food products from Niagara Region.

Action 1

Promote local food and encourage local food literacy – foster a "choose local first" approach for agri-food products
Tasks
Identify agri-food linkages to understand the cluster /value chain (e.g. comprehensive approach, asset mapping, clarify requirements to government) and address gaps.
Pilot an exchange portal that enables institutional buyers to securely post their needs and Niagara-based firms to bid on filling them.
Ensure that the Region and its municipalities lead by example by giving prominence to Niagara-sourced products in all facilities under their jurisdiction (cafeterias, concessions, etc.); designate and profile a 'Niagara agri-food product of the month' in which its health benefits are featured.
Encourage more physical activity by promoting gardening as recreation in which Niagara-grown floral products and nursery stock are used and which provide insight into what local products are available and how they are grown.

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POTENTIAL TASK ‘C’

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES


C – Foster Innovation: Position the agriculture, food processing, food retail and food service sector in Niagara Region as “the place to do business”

Action 1

Empower institutions and entrepreneurs to develop and support opportunities in the agri-food sector.
Tasks
Capitalize on leading institutions including Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Brock University and Niagara College to promote leadership in programs to enhance innovation and commercialization in regional agri-food production.
Pilot establishment of a central contact (or portal) that Niagara agri-food entrepreneurs can access for assistance connecting with existing resources to commercialize ideas and attract, encourage and develop investment in Niagara’s agri-food sector.

Action 2

Support access to and facilitate introduction of new technologies including varietal introductions, growing systems, ways of storing and packaging, and of processing.
Tasks
Pilot an innovation opportunities fund to seed small projects with specific goals that include (a) trials of new varieties (b) adoption of new processes (c) recovery of value from culls or second quality fruit, vegetables and ornamentals.
Host a biennial Agri-Food Innovation Forum in which Niagara innovations are showcased and recognized and where innovative solutions around the world are profiled.



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POTENTIAL TASK ‘D’

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES


D – Enable the Agri-Food Cluster: Harmonize regulations and create an “open for business” government

Action 1

Build on the fact that agri-food is a leading economic engine in Niagara
Tasks
Expand irrigation lands to the north of the Escarpment and communicate why this infrastructure is necessary.
Pilot a public/private partnership to expand the production base and establish innovative ways to balance competing interests. (i.e., use of public land to cultivate environmentally friendly crops).
Work with private providers of essential infrastructure services (natural gas, electrical power, and advanced telecommunications) to monitor service levels and expand access by the agri-food sector.
Establish Community Improvement Program under the Planning Act to support new agri-food businesses.

Action 2

Reduce the burden on agri-food operators and bring more timeliness and certainty to approval processes while keeping the economy nimble and retaining the integrity of the regulatory regime.
Tasks
Pilot an expeditor function to assist agri-food business in working with all agencies having jurisdiction over development approvals to streamline the approval process and maintain accountability.
Pilot and promote projects that build synergies between compatible agri-food businesses for more efficient use of resources such as water and energy cogeneration.



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POTENTIAL TASK 'E'

FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES

E – Cultivate New Approaches: Be a leader in developing programs to support food and farming.

Action 1

Support value chain integration (manufacturing, servicing, processing) and opportunities to increase the value that is added to agri-food products in Niagara, extend their market reach and capitalize on synergies to reduce costs
Tasks
Support the Beck Economic Cluster to ensure agri-food is included in the "incentive centre" as an existing asset that requires power.
Identify major inputs and services used by Niagara agri-food enterprises that are sourced outside the region that could be generated in Niagara and target investment attraction in those opportunities. (Examples: metal fabrication for greenhouse construction, specialty glass bottles for wine and juices, transport and logistics services)

Action 2

Foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Ensure regulation is flexible to allow new approaches to be implemented
Task
Pilot a regional connection to support design and approval of labelling for high value food markets (including ethnic, organic, specialty, etc.) and developing expertise for label requirements in international markets.
Listen to the operators – keep open communications



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