

Food Access

Goal Statement:

Increase the availability of healthy food for all residents.

Rationale: Access to safe, nutritious, affordable and personally acceptable food contributes to residents' overall health, lowering their risk of many chronic diseases. Land use planning can have a profound impact on whether or not residents have ready access to sources of safe and healthy foods such as grocery stores, farmers' markets and community gardens.³⁹ Healthy food locations that are accessible by transit or are within walking/biking distances of neighbourhoods are particularly supportive of residents meeting their nutritional needs.⁴⁰ This is particularly important for lower income areas where research demonstrates an association between food deserts, lower income neighbourhoods and access to fresh groceries.⁴¹

Protecting and conserving agricultural land and water is essential for food production and a sustainable food system that meets the health and nutrition needs of residents. A sustainable food system provides a fair living for growers and processors, and promotes local self-reliance and environmental sustainability.⁴² A region with a diverse agricultural economy linked to local food needs and markets will be more sustainable in the long term, with lower environmental costs, reduced demands on transportation infrastructure and potentially higher food quality that helps serve local nutrition objectives.⁴⁰

Policies that enhance food access and support a healthy local food system that includes food production, processing, distribution, marketing/retail, consumption and waste disposal components contribute to the long-term health and well-being of a community.

- FA 1** Ensure that healthy food is available in every neighbourhood.
- FA 2** Protect and conserve land and water for use in the growing and production of food as part of a sustainable local food system.

Food Access

Objective 1

FA 1 - Ensure that healthy food is available in every neighbourhood.

Rationale: People are more likely to meet their nutrition needs when healthy, affordable and safe food sources are within easy reach.⁴⁰ Residents in neighbourhoods without a retailer of healthy foods, often turn to more expensive, less healthy processed foods from nearby convenience stores and fast food restaurants. Households that lack income and access to transportation are affected more than others.³⁹ People with restricted mobility are particularly vulnerable.⁴³

Municipalities have an important role to play through developing land use policies that allow for grocery stores and community food initiatives (community gardens, community food centres, farmers' markets) within easy reach of neighbourhoods. Municipalities can provide expertise in garden planning and design, access to land, a safe water supply, tax relief, insurance coverage and gardening materials such as soil, water, compost and tools.⁴⁴ Municipalities can also ensure there are safe and convenient pedestrian, bike and transit connections between neighbourhoods and food destinations. This is particularly supportive of residents with restricted access to transportation.^{3,4}

Healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by:

c) avoiding development and land use patterns which may cause environmental or public health and safety concerns;

e) promoting cost-effective development patterns and standards to minimize land consumption and servicing costs;

(Provincial Policy Statement 2014, 1.1.1)

/// Planning Policies

- FA 1.1** The zoning bylaw shall include mixed-use zones to facilitate the inclusion of small and medium sized food retailers, such as grocery stores, mobile food vendors and farmers' markets close to new and existing residential areas, particularly those areas that are underserved.
- FA 1.2** The zoning bylaw shall allow urban agriculture initiatives such as community gardens, edible landscaping and roof top gardens in residential, commercial, and institutional designations (e.g. health, cultural, and municipally owned facilities, places of worship and schools).
- FA 1.3** Land use designations shall allow for the development of small-scale food processing facilities and distribution centres (e.g. community kitchens, food co-ops and community food centres).

/// Implementation Activities

Short term

- i)** Conduct a community food assessment to identify neighbourhoods that are underserved by healthy food retailers and develop a plan to increase food retailers in these areas.
- ii)** Conduct an assessment of neighbourhood accessibility to healthy food retailers via pedestrian, bike and transit connections and develop a plan to increase access.
- iii)** Strike a community task force to identify and develop opportunities for community agriculture initiatives.
- iv)** Work with local growers and other interested stakeholders to develop a community food centre that supports increased access to food and food skills for local residents.



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Long-term economic prosperity should be supported by:

h) providing opportunities to support local food, and promoting the sustainability of agri-food and agri-product businesses by protecting agricultural resources, and minimizing land use conflicts;

(Provincial Policy Statement 2014, 1.7.1)

Medium Term

- i) Establish a process for fast-tracking development approval for small and medium sized food retailers, such as grocery stores, mobile food vendors and farmers' markets in underserved areas.
- ii) Engage the community task force in developing an education and outreach program to highlight the importance of urban agriculture and how it can be integrated into public and private spaces.

Long Term

- i) Offer incentives to:
 - small and medium sized food retailers to locate in underserved areas;
 - encourage the formation of grower co-ops, incubator kitchens and/or other economic development initiatives related to local food.
- ii) Engage and enable local vendors and growers to provide healthy foods for residents in municipally owned facilities through procurement policies, requests for proposals, tenders and food purchasing contracts.
- iii) Establish community access to kitchen facilities in municipally owned buildings for food skills education, community kitchen programs, small-scale food processing and food distribution.



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Objective 2

FA 2 - Protect and conserve land and water for use in the growing and production of food as part of a sustainable local food system.

Rationale: Ontario agricultural lands are in decline and the province is nearing its capacity for self-sufficiency in food production. It is estimated that by 2036, Ontario may fall short of its population's food producing requirements by up to 1,267,000 hectares.⁴⁵

The food produced, distributed and sold within a region can play a major role in how well the dietary needs of the population are met.⁴⁰ Communities with ready access to a sustainable supply of healthy, locally grown and produced foods are less vulnerable to external factors that can affect the food supply.⁴⁶ Municipalities can make zoning bylaw decisions to protect and conserve land and water required for a sustainable local food system.

Opportunities to support a diversified rural economy should be promoted by protecting agricultural and other resource-related uses and directing non-related development to areas where it will minimize constraints on these uses.

(Provincial Policy Statement 2014, 1.1.5.7)

Prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture.

Prime agricultural areas are areas where prime agricultural lands predominate. Specialty crop areas shall be given the highest priority for protection, followed by Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands, and any associated Class 4 through 7 lands ...

(Provincial Policy Statement 2014, 2.3.1)

/// Planning Policies

- FA 2.1** Land use designations and transportation plans shall protect and conserve local agricultural food production capacity by restricting the fragmentation of agricultural lands, protecting areas of agricultural importance and potential, and preserving rural and cultural landscapes.
- FA 2.2** The zoning bylaw shall allow for a diversity of agricultural uses such as greenhouses, orchards and locally oriented market gardens requiring a variety of farm sizes, including smaller farms.
- FA 2.3** Land use designations shall allow for small-scale home industries and home occupations, including food-based enterprises that are supportive of agricultural activities.
- FA 2.4** The zoning bylaw shall allow for the development of distribution and/or processing centres (such as a regional food hub) and agricultural product warehouses that support the collection, distribution and marketing of local food products.

/// Implementation Activities

Short term

- i) Strike a community task force to undertake a community food system assessment identifying challenges and opportunities to strengthen the local food system.
- ii) Identify specialty crop and class 1, 2, 3 agricultural lands and assess the impact of competing interests such as mineral aggregates and urban development on food production capacity.
- iii) Identify land with potential for food production such as conservation areas and make it available for small-scale farm use.

Medium Term

- i) Develop an education and outreach program for developers and residents to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of protecting and conserving farmland as part of a sustainable local food system.

Long Term

- i) Develop a long-term food systems strategy that addresses all aspects of a sustainable local food system.