

# Agri-Food cluster in Golden Horseshoe and Holland Marsh generates \$34.7 billion

By Anne Howden Thompson

A new study says that the agriculture and food processing sector that stretches across the Golden Horseshoe and Holland Marsh and generates \$34.7 billion of annual economic activity in the provincial and national economies could significantly grow its economic impact, if governments and stakeholders at all levels seize the opportunity. Currently the second-largest economic driver in Ontario's economy, the Golden Horseshoe agriculture and food processing cluster is poised to be a major solutions provider to help feed the world's growing population, reduce Ontario's health care costs through healthy food choices, and a green source of heat and power.

"As farmers and food processors in Niagara, Hamilton, the GTA and the Holland Marsh, we comprise North America's second-largest agriculture and food processing cluster", emphasized Halton corn, soybean and wheat farmer Peter Lambrick, chair of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan Steering Committee. Lambrick spoke today at a summit of Golden Horseshoe food and farming stakeholders held in Mississauga. The summit will help set a ten-year action plan based on the study findings.

Nick Ferri, a Peel Region pick-your-own strawberry and apple grower, and chair of the GTA Agriculture Action Committee added, "We are uniquely positioned with a favourable combination of

## Ten-year strategy will require stakeholder alignment

soil and water resources, infrastructure, business networks and people. Both domestic and export markets see us as a quality provider. The main challenge we face is to ensure stakeholders are aligned and the right business environment is in place to grow success", he said.

Other opportunities for the food and farming cluster in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe and Holland Marsh include: positioning the food and farming cluster and health care networks in the region as world-leading partners in managing health through

food; targeting ethnically-diverse markets in the GTA; implementation of a consistent "smart regulation" approach by government, to address efficient and effective application of food and farming regulatory issues;

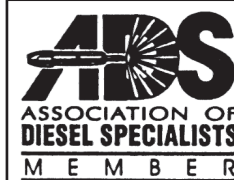
accelerating investment in research to extend the growing season through varieties and growing systems;

growing popularity of direct sales channels for locally-grown food; and green, non-food uses of food and farming outputs and by-products, such as biofuels and bio-composites made from plant fibres, as well as bio-digesting food waste for heat and power.

Some challenges noted in the study for food and farming in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe include the cost of energy, the cost of labour, and the scale and complexity of Canada's food retail business.

The study, commissioned by the Greater Toronto Area Agriculture Action Committee (GTAAAC), together with the City of Hamilton, Niagara Region and Holland Marsh Growers' Association, was prepared by Planscape Inc. of Bracebridge. Funding support for the research was provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Pro-

gram (CAAP). In Ontario, this program is delivered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council. Other funders include the regional governments and local federations of agriculture within the GTA and Golden Horseshoe, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority and The Greenbelt Foundation.



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Soil and Water Management Workshop with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) Soil Team in the Bradford area, Simcoe County on June 22nd from 9 am to 3:45 pm. Cost: \$80 (\$60 for OSCIA members). Complete information, including registration form: <http://bit.ly/mMe3l0>. Registration deadline: Wed. June 15.

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