



Food & Farming: An Action Plan 2021

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan

The food and farming cluster in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe is vital to every person in Ontario. It contributes to our health, our economy and ultimately, our quality of life.

The Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, in partnership with the Region of Niagara and the City of Hamilton, has launched the **Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021**, to ensure the growth and vitality of this sector – one of the largest food and farming clusters in North America.

The food and farming cluster is comprised of enterprises and institutions involved in growing, harvesting, processing and distributing food, beverage and bioproducts derived from agriculture. It also includes ornamental products, equestrian activities and bio-energy applications.

Opportunities and Challenges

The Golden Horseshoe is an agricultural treasure that stretches along the shores of Lake Ontario. Its unique land features, high-quality soils, favourable climate and abundant water supplies have given the region a bounty of more than 200 different agricultural crops for local, national and international markets, including the vast neighbouring U.S. market. The majority of Ontario's food processing operations, major food retailers and thousands of food and farming entrepreneurs are also found in the region, providing a wealth of opportunities for the area to prosper as a world-renowned centre for food production.

The Golden Horseshoe is the fastest growing region in Canada with a population of 8.1 million in 2011 projected to 11.5 million by 2031.

However, a number of serious issues threaten this vital sector which is also one of Ontario's largest employers. Many of these challenges are associated with rapid population expansion – urbanization, fierce competition for land, gaps in infrastructure and traffic congestion. Others include multiple and conflicting government policies and regulations, rising fuel costs, the uncertainty about climate change impacts, lack of integration and collective purpose within the cluster and a low level of awareness about the many social, economic and health benefits the cluster offers Ontario and Canada as a whole.

The annual economic activity of the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster is estimated to be \$12.3 billion. This direct economic activity, in turn, is estimated to contribute \$35 billion annually to the Canadian economy through the multiplier effect.

Highlights of the Food and Farming Action Plan

The Action Plan sets the stage for proper recognition of the many benefits of the farm and food cluster in the Golden Horseshoe. It is a blueprint for supporting and growing a thriving and integrated sector by focusing on **enhancing competitiveness, promoting sustainability** and **removing barriers** to growth.

Vision of the Food and Farming Action Plan

The Golden Horseshoe is globally renowned as a vibrant food and farming cluster, characterized by profitable farming operations, a thriving hub of food processing, food retail and service businesses, extensive research capacity, innovative technology, and a wide range of healthy and safe products.

Opportunities for Change

The Action Plan focuses on five key opportunities to address the challenges and achieve the vision. It outlines a range of strategies and actions to support these opportunities. (The full range of actions can be found in the Action Plan.)

- A. **Grow the Cluster** so it becomes the leading food and farming cluster in the world, renowned for healthy and safe food products. This will be accomplished by coordinating economic development, finding the voids, filling the gaps and building on the strengths of the region.
- B. **Link Food, Farming and Health:** Educate current and future consumers about the importance of locally-sourced food and farming products for enhancing their health and well-being. This will be done by working closely with a broad range of stakeholders to educate and inform consumers about healthy food products from the Golden Horseshoe.
- C. **Foster Innovation:** Encourage and support innovation to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster. This opportunity will be realized by strategically positioning the agriculture, food processing, retail and service sectors in the Golden Horseshoe as ‘the place to do business.’
- D. **Enable the Cluster:** Align policy tools and their application to enable food and farming businesses to be increasingly competitive and profitable. Harmonizing regulations, providing one-stop shopping for approvals and creating an “open-for-business environment” are the key strategies to meet this opportunity.
- E. **Cultivate New Approaches:** Pilot new approaches to support food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe by being a leader in developing research and programs to support food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe.

Implementing the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan

The Action Plan is a comprehensive, dynamic, living plan, like the food and farming cluster itself. It is the product of many sector-related representatives and associations and others throughout the region who contributed their insights and ideas. Coordination, co-operation and effective communications among all stakeholders, regional, municipal and provincial governments and our partners will be the markers of success as we implement the plan over the coming years.

To learn more about The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan, you can view it on the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee website www.gtaa.ca

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