

## City scales back plan for locally grown food

**Revised proposal would put extra \$15,000 of Ontario produce on menus at 37 daycares**

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Mike Schreiner helps promote local sustainable food systems and says farmers should blow their own horns.

A grand plan to buy more locally grown food for city-run daycares, shelters and long-term care homes has been significantly watered down to a plan involving just 37 child care centres.

Toronto's government management committee today will consider a proposal for an extra \$15,000 next year to buy tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and lettuce that are grown in Ontario but are more expensive at certain times of the year.

The original plan, which called for adding \$100,000 to an \$11 million food budget to buy more locally produced food, was deferred last spring when five out of six councillors voted to postpone it.

Buying more local food is a major part of the city's climate-change policy, adopted unanimously in 2007, on the grounds that greenhouse-gas emissions are reduced if food is shipped shorter distances.

But Councillor Gord Perks said the city has learned it's not easy for institutional purchasers to determine where food is grown.

"We want to create a system where you actually know how the food got there," he said, arguing now for a phased-in program.

For example, a can of tomatoes might contain Ontario produce one week, but not the next. Pre-made soup might contain locally grown carrots and potatoes sometimes, and imported ingredients at other times.

Of the city's 57 child care centres, the plan would involve the 37 that serve food prepared on site.

Twenty per cent, or \$260,000, of their \$1.3 million food budget is already used to buy locally produced items, including dairy, eggs and meat.

A further 22 per cent of the budget is allocated for products that aren't grown in Ontario, such as rice, bananas and oranges.

The proposal calls for the children's services division, which operates daycares, to ask suppliers to use local food instead of imported whenever there's no difference in cost and quality – an estimated 5 per cent of food purchased.

Adding \$15,000 for Ontario produce would raise the proportion of local food by 3 per cent.

Staff will be asked to report back on the pilot project and how the idea can be expanded before the 2010 budget process.

"I think the principle is a good one," said Councillor Gloria Lindsay Luby, who chairs the government management committee. "I think we should encourage our farmers to keep farming."

She had concerns about the earlier report, which called for "local" and "sustainable" food, terms that are hard to define.

Jamie Kirkpatrick of the Toronto Environmental Alliance, which wants the city to buy at least 50 per cent local, said he would be pleased if the city made a commitment.

"They'll see there are great opportunities for buying local and it won't cost more," Kirkpatrick said. "It's a win-win for the environment and the economy."