



A Fresh Approach: Local Food Procurement by the Public Sector

**Supporting Ontario's Greenbelt,
Where Possibility Grows**





Greenbelt*fresh*.ca
Greenbelt Farmers' Online Market



This guide was written by the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA). Since 1988 TEA has been campaigning locally to find solutions to Toronto's urban environmental problems. TEA envisions Toronto as a green, healthy, and equitable city with economic activity that sustains our environment.



This guide was commissioned by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors only and do not necessarily represent the views of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, their Officers or Directors. We have done our best to confirm that all facts and figures are accurate. However, we do not retain liability for any errors or misrepresentations.



Possibility grows here.

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Introduction

There is an undeniable trend these days that finds more people choosing to eat local food. It is a movement that is intertwined with people wanting to eat healthy and feel secure about where their food comes from, take positive steps towards environmental change, while directing dollars into the coffers of local farmers and, by extension, the local economy. For many people it is not just one, but many factors contributing to fundamental change in consumer habits. Indeed, it is a trend that is proving powerful, as it is changing food service and finding a voice among many advocates within the food industry itself.

Admittedly, going local is a challenge for many, which is why we've developed this guide to help make change more manageable. While working within existing budgets is essential, people need to recognize that going local is more than substituting imported products with local products. Incorporating local foods requires rethinking what you serve, how it's prepared, and even cultivating relationships with local farmers so they can deliver the products that you need. Some food providers are doing business with new distributors that are choosing to source from local suppliers.

Ontario's Broader Public Sector, through its commitment to public service and its buying power, can make a significant contribution to supporting Ontario food, Ontario farms and the Ontario economy. The trend to going local is largely happening in the province's Greater Golden Horseshoe region, home to the largest population in Ontario and the largest concentration of municipalities, universities and colleges, schools and hospitals. Over 7,000 farms in and around the protected Greenbelt region produce all types of vegetables, fruit, nuts, meats, dairy, grains, numerous specialty items, ethnocultural varieties, as well as prepared and processed options. While this guide is intended to help you get started in your kitchen, there are many leaders in and around the Greenbelt in your sector who can also help.

Local Food Procurement

It's clear that change is afoot among consumers and the food service industry in their efforts to buy local food. Research strongly suggests that Ontarians are increasingly more interested in knowing where their food is from, and that they prefer fresh food that's grown or raised close to home. Restaurants, retailers and a burgeoning number of farmers markets are promoting local food among their clientele while attracting greater media attention. The public sector—from municipalities to universities to schools and others—is helping to lead the charge in Ontario when it comes to sourcing local food and providing it to customers.

Locally-sourced food cuts down greenhouse gas and smog emissions by avoiding long-haul truck transport. This also means it is fresher and often healthier. Buying local food helps preserve our agricultural land (especially in the Greenbelt) and in so doing helps local farmers and food processors thrive.

It is also becoming clear that local food is cost competitive with imported food. In season, Ontario-grown produce is often cheaper than the same imported crop. Importing food when local produce is available not only costs us more, it causes harm to the environment while diverting money out of our local economy. Purchasing local food supports small and mid-size farmers who, in turn, provide many benefits to their communities. This includes farming in ways that protect biodiversity and natural habitats, local air and water quality, and while preserving scenic landscapes and open spaces.

For these reasons and many others, the Ontario Government is helping to promote and support local food. The Province recognizes the power and capacity of public institutions to deliver more locally-grown food to local consumers. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) has introduced several funding programs aimed at boosting Ontarians' growing appetite for local food.

Public Institutions as Agents of Change

Universities, colleges, hospitals and other institutions throughout the province are thinking more about the environmental impact of their purchasing activities and operations. Initiatives such as recycled paper for printing, using more efficient appliances and switching to CFL light bulbs have become commonplace in an effort to make a difference. It is increasingly clear that institutions can be important drivers for the development of more socially and environmentally responsible products and services. This is especially becoming clear in the realm of food preparation and food service. By taking the simple step of choosing to buy foods that are grown and processed locally, institutions can have a measurable impact.

The Growing Infrastructure that Supports Local Food

Ontario's Greenbelt

The Greenbelt was legislated in February of 2005 with the purpose of protecting farmlands and environmentally sensitive land from urban development and sprawl. The Greenbelt's 1.8 million acres (728,000 hectares) wraps around the Golden Horseshoe and is vital to the quality of life of Ontarians. It encompasses the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine, Rouge Park, agricultural land, pristine environment, and hundreds of rural towns and villages.



Agriculture in the Greenbelt

- There are approximately 6,300 farms in the Greenbelt. Farming is still largely a family affair, with the majority of operations sole proprietorships.
- The Greenbelt preserves some of the most valuable agricultural lands in Canada, providing fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, beef, pork and poultry products, as well as grapes for prize-winning wineries.
- The Greenbelt produces over one-quarter of Ontario's apples (26.57%); 87.63% of Ontario's peaches; 50.04% of Ontario's sour cherries; over 85% of Ontario's grapes; and, 42.59% of Ontario's raspberries.
- The Holland Marsh is Ontario's vegetable basket producing carrots, onions, lettuce, celery, potatoes, cauliflower, beets, radish and parsnips. Enough carrots are grown in the Holland Marsh to provide every man, woman and child in Canada with four pounds annually.

For More information on Ontario's Greenbelt visit: <http://www.greenbelt.ca>

Additional Government Initiatives

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) has several funding and research programs geared to assist local food production. Recently, OMAFRA expanded its commitment to promoting local food by funding programs aimed at boosting the availability of local food to food service businesses. Through the Ontario Market Investment Fund, organizations can have their investments in local food projects matched to put plans into action that support the advancement of local food markets. For more information on provincial funding opportunities visit: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/index.html>

The longstanding Foodland Ontario brand and "Good things grow in Ontario" jingle encourages consumers to choose local food. The Foodland brand has been expanded recently to include dairy products in addition to fresh fruit and vegetables. For More information visit <http://foodland.gov.on.ca/>





The Savour Ontario program is part of the province's Pick Ontario Freshness strategy, an effort that aims to encourage consumers to choose locally-grown and produced foods. Savour Ontario was developed in consultation with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, and is designed to promote the bounty of Ontario's fresh, high quality foods typically found in fine-dining establishments and vacation style restaurants. Visit www.savourontario.ca for a listing of Ontario's finest restaurants with links to their menus celebrating fresh Ontario foods.

Market Response to Local Food

Beyond government, activity is underway on a number of fronts in helping to build interest in locally grown food. The number of Farmers' Markets has doubled in recent years. The City of Toronto adopted an ambitious local food procurement policy with the intention of getting to 50% local food buying for its agencies. The University of Toronto has continued to offer local and sustainable food to its students in a successful partnership with Local Food Plus.

The following represents a few more examples of available programs and dedicated organizations:

100 Mile Market – <http://www.100milemarket.com/html/home.html>

100 Mile Market supports and promotes sustainable local food production and distribution. They offer a single source supply of local food products.

EcoSource – <http://ecosource.ca/>

Through their Youth and Local Food program EcoSource connects farmers, students and families through fun events and incisive workshops. EcoSource is also responsible for the creation of the first ever Go Ontario Granola bar. Visit www.greenbeltfresh.ca for more information on this incredible snack.

Holland Marsh Growers Association – <http://www.hollandmarshgold.com>

The Holland Marsh is home to some of the most fertile soil in the country which sustains the cultivation of many rare leafy greens, and is why it has been given the name 'Canada's Salad Bowl'. This is a great association for purchasers seeking rare or unique locally grown produce.

Homegrown Ontario – <http://homegrownontario.ca/>

Homegrown Ontario is an alliance of Ontario Pork, the Ontario Veal Association, the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency, Turkey Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Independent Meat Processors who, together, operate under a common brand, which is easily identifiable for consumers.

Local Food Plus – <http://localfoodplus.ca>

Local Food Plus is a non-profit organization committed to building a local and sustainable food system. They certify local and sustainable food products and connect purchasers with the processors and growers of local sustainable food.

Vineland Fruit Growers – <http://www.vinelandgrowers.com/>

The Vineland Fruit Growers Co-Operative is a group of fruit growers from the Niagara Region that collectively provide marketing, administration and supply of fresh fruit in Ontario.

The Benefits of Buying Locally Grown Food

Buying Local Food is Good for Business

Despite the numerous benefits local food offers, for many there is still a stigma attached to it. Local food is typically perceived as more expensive than “non-local” food. However, in many circumstances locally grown Ontario food is significantly cheaper than equivalent imports.

The City of Toronto, in advance of its adopting an historic local food procurement policy researched the cost factors involved in shifting their purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables from non-local to local. In general the cost of local food is perceived to be higher, something suppliers identify as a barrier to purchasing. However, data provided by Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada on monthly average price comparisons of fresh Ontario Fruits and Vegetables throughout the year to those produced in other areas, suggests that this may not be accurate. Users can perform a variety of searches and investigate changes in various types of food pricing on the Agriculture and Agri-Foods website: http://www4.agr.gc.ca/IH5_Reports/



As global food prices continue to rise, the social and environmental benefits of buying local food can yield further financial benefits to businesses that choose to go local. Meanwhile, fluctuations in oil prices can result in increased transportation costs for food, which will have an impact on price for those foods transported long distances. This looming reality is one more factor that may help shift purchasing away from non-local food. As local food purchasing increases, especially with the support from large institutions, there will be a demand shift towards more local product, providing the support local producers need while helping to normalize food prices.

Buying Local Food is Good for the Economy

Buying locally means every dollar spent helps contribute to a stronger local economy and preserves the viability of local agriculture. These farms and food producers are crucial to a healthy and diversified economy. Buying local comes with “multiplier effects,” which are used to capture the indirect economic benefits of given activities. For an in-depth exploration of local multipliers visit: <http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/about/index.htm>

In the case of local food, a multiplier can be useful in determining how much money committed to local food stays within the local economy to generate further benefits, and how much leaves. The methodology of multipliers can always be improved with more specifics, but the results are driven by a simple fact: Local businesses spend more locally - on management, advertising and services. Because most economic multipliers are in the range of two to four times the initial expenditure, these differences in local business spending will always result in substantially greater benefits to the local economy. While dollars spent with large corporations almost immediately leave the community, the majority of distributors and suppliers of local food goods are small- to medium-sized enterprises who by their nature have local ties to the community. That translates into dollars spent in the immediate vicinity, which naturally has a positive impact on the local economy.

Buying Local Food is Good for the Environment

Buying local reduces the amount of fossil fuels used to transport food and, by extension, the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. In a study done by Bentley and Barker (2005) a comparison between a local farmers market and a national grocery store was carried out to calculate the difference in food miles. They found that locally grown (Farmers Market) food travelled approximately 101 km, while the same produce travelling to a national grocery store travelled on average 5,364 km – entirely 81 times further.

Foods imported long distances are also part of an industrial food system that often relies heavily on energy-intensive fertilizers, pesticides and tremendous amounts of water. Eating food that increases the production of greenhouse gases is really no bargain as we pay the price with a more unstable climate that makes it harder to grow food, threatens the security of world food supplies and will likely raise global food prices.

Fresh Local Food is Healthy, Nutritious and Safe

Locally grown food is harvested at the peak of flavour and freshness. Food consumed closer to the time it is harvested has been shown to retain more vital minerals and nutrients than food that is transported for days before it reaches the consumer. According to a study conducted by Ontario Nature and the Ontario College of Family Physicians, vitamin C, thiamine, riboflavin and folic acid can decrease when improper storing and other conditions are not met or exceeded (light, temperature and storing time). You can view this report and others at: www.greenbeltforhealth.ca

Concerning the matter of food safety, Ontario maintains stringent standards. This includes numerous traceability programs which can be implemented, notably with financial assistance through OMAFRA as well as globally recognized programs such as HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) and Can Trace. OMAFRA provides their own Good Agriculture Practices Manual which offers growers the necessary information to keep their products safe. For more information visit: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/foodsafety/producers/good-ag-practices.htm>.

OMAFRA's support for farmers helps to ensure purchasers are receiving safe, reliable food. Understanding the protection the farmers and processors have also gives purchasers peace of mind knowing that these products are safe for consumption.

Increase your Local Food Purchasing

This section provides practical steps on how to begin increasing the amount of local food purchased by your institution. Case studies provided on www.GreenbeltFresh.ca are also full of helpful materials and ideas. Before starting to identify any necessary changes, it's best to have a clear understanding of your current food ordering tendencies.

Step 1. Complete a Food Audit

It is important to do a food audit because you need to know what ingredients you purchase but also how these ingredients are delivered and handled by your staff once the food arrives (e.g. raw, ready to serve, frozen, etc.). This information will help better direct your go local strategy.

Performing a food audit lets you determine what you purchase and where the food comes from. Knowing the answers to what and where from can help you resolve where a switch to local products can be made. For instance if you discover that you are buying carrots from a supplier who is getting them from the United States, that could be one of the products switched to a local supplier. The

Appendix includes a very basic outline of what a food audit would look like, taking into account what the product purchased is, how much of the product, the supplier and where the product was originally grown, and whether it is available in Ontario.



Step 2. Identify Ways to Increase Local Food Content

The options below are listed in order from easy to more difficult. The impact of each replacement option increases your local food content depending on how your food is currently delivered. Refer back to your completed audit to determine the impact of each replacement.

Simple replacement: Identify which of the fresh or frozen food products that you currently buy are available locally. Replace imports with locally sourced options. When it comes to fruits and vegetables and specialities such as mushrooms, this will change with seasonality. The Greenbelt contains many greenhouses growing tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and peppers. Meat, cheese, yogurt and other dairy, plus spices and many specialities are grown year-round. The www.Greenbeltfresh.ca database has a comprehensive list of what you can find on local farms.

Shift from frozen to fresh: Currently, there is a limited amount of frozen fresh fruits and vegetables available locally. This is changing slowly with both public and private sector investments in local food infrastructure. Until things change, find what you can substitute easily. If other changes are more difficult, make a note of internal staff and equipment changes required. For example, can you do your own chopping and freezing to realize budget savings?

Fresh prepared, versus fresh: This includes food products from sliced carrots to baked goods and prepared snacks. Consider working with distributors and farmers to get food sliced or bagged properly, but also think about internal changes. There are new prepared products on the market that are made almost entirely by using local ingredients. See the list at <http://Greenbeltfresh.ca>

Getting away from ready to serve: This step will undoubtedly require a greater investment of your time and may require additional kitchen equipment. This is where it is worth taking a look at the whole system, provided you are ready to do this. Look at your menu and identify possible changes that would use more locally available food products. Consider incorporating seasonal menu items. Seasonal themed menus allow you to take advantage of the peak locally available food products.

Step 3. Talk to Wholesaler and Distributors

This may be one of the biggest challenges to going local. Be sure to ask your suppliers which of their products are local. Just by asking, you are initiating an important discussion. Most suppliers will make it a priority to provide the food you want.

Work with your wholesalers and distributors to find local ingredients for processed foods. Consider replacing some of your processed food purchases with fresh local ingredients. These fruits and vegetables, picked when they are ripe, will taste much better than products picked before they are ripe and then shipped across the world.

When purchasing meat, the choice is between federally- or provincially-licensed. Each is regulated under different legislation. Federally inspected abattoirs are regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and are allowed to sell their products inside and outside of the province. Provincial abattoirs are regulated by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food under the Food Safety and Quality Act. These abattoirs differ only in scale and scope, not safety.

There are a smaller number of federal abattoirs but they process greater than half the total amount of livestock. Conversely there are a higher number of provincially licensed abattoirs but they process less than 20% of the livestock in Ontario. OMAFRA handles the inspection of provincially licensed abattoirs and provides a list of them on their website by type of livestock, which is available here: http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/meatinsp/licenced_operators_list.htm

Ontario Independent Meat Producers (OIMP) also offers a useful search engine for Ontario meat suppliers, which includes some rare products such as emu. This search engine can be accessed from the OIMP's website at: <http://www.ontariomeatproducts.ca/products.aspx>

Step 4. Do your own research into local food sourcing

There are numerous organizations ready to assist with implementing an enhanced local food purchasing strategy. Start with the organizations listed above in the Market Response section. In addition, the www.Greenbeltfresh.ca Online Market is a great source for farmers and distributors who are providing local foods.

Step 5. Implement Change

Having completed your own investigation and reviewed the resources available, what follows are some recommended steps to implement changes in your institution.

a) Institutionalize your Commitment

Set challenging targets that your organization feels it can meet. Write these targets up and make it part of the institution's existing policy. Stating your commitment in a policy helps ensure that you and the clients you work with will make an extra effort to stand by those objectives.

Ask your existing distributors to source locally as much as possible and to identify which food products are local on your invoices. Making requests like these are important. If your existing distributor is unwilling to accommodate your request for clearly identified local food, be sure to share this information with your institution's management. If your distributor cannot meet your requests, ensure this is considered at the next available opportunity to renegotiate the terms of your contract.

b) Change your Requests for Proposals (RFP)

The RFP will ensure that the suppliers bidding on your contracts know of your commitment to purchase locally grown food. Adjust your requests for proposals (RFP) to include local food criterion and language that gives preference to bidders who promise to use local sources.

Include rating criteria in the RFP that rewards the inclusion of increasing amounts of local food. Consider adjusting your invoice payment system. Smaller suppliers will be more restricted by cash flow considerations than larger, national suppliers. Simple things like agreeing to pay food distributions biweekly rather than monthly or bimonthly will remove a barrier to local food distributors without an increase in cost to your institution.

Example: During the development of their Local Food Procurement Policy the City of Toronto included the following language in its RFP for the food service contract for its childcare facilities:

The City is to engage a distributor that will work collaboratively with the Division to support the dietary requirement of the children in care. It is the expectation of the City that the vendor will have the flexibility to adjust as required to the potentially emerging city policies on purchasing local food.

This simple wording provided some of the leverage needed with the successful proponent to ensure that they work together with city staff on increasing the amount of available Ontario grown products. The City of Toronto is currently investigating further adjustments to its RFPs that will give greater preference or points to the food service agencies that can offer the most local food.

c) Reach Out to Farmers

To learn more about the local suppliers operating in your community and to make them aware of your initiative to buy more local food, host an event inviting local farmers to come and chat with various end customers. There are various groups representing farmers or types of farms, such as the Holland Marsh Growers or Local Food Plus, which has a searchable online database.

d) Audit Staff Training

If you decide to move away from using non-local processed foods to more unprocessed local foods, more prep work will be necessary to create meals (e.g. chopping carrots, peeling potatoes, etc.). More time and additional equipment may be necessary to help you make a smooth transition.

e) Tweak your Menu

Creating or tweaking a menu is a great way to make going local easier. Having seasonal menus will ease the selection of not only local food, but the freshest produce available. Even if the entire menu is not changed you should offer an entire meal option (appetizer, main course and a dessert) and advertise this to your consumers. It is important for your supplier to know about your commitment to local foods, but also to let your consumers know. The goal is to give them the opportunity to eat local and understand the effort your institution is making by going local.

f) Optimize your Budget

Group procurement or bulk purchasing is an option if you can gather multiple purchasers together to negotiate with a single supplier. Universities and colleges within one city or region have a natural connection and they can ensure a supplier of consistent business. Hospitals could form another group given the likelihood of similar menus and thus would require similar products to make them. This is a good situation for all as suppliers benefit from increasing their sales and each institution will get a lower rate for buying in bulk.

If you have one main food service contractor you will need to plan with them for your switch to local foods. Present them with a detailed plan of how much of their supply you want to be locally grown. If they cannot supply you with requirement of locally grown products you may need to switch certain products that are easily found with local suppliers. You may need to access several different suppliers to meet your entire food product needs, but this will ensure that you are serving healthy, nutritious and environmentally responsible food.

It's unlikely that small- and medium-sized suppliers will act similarly to large ones. They may not have the same selling experience, technical expertise or information. They certainly won't have the same financial resources. Consider adopting invoice payment arrangements that remove barriers to working with small

scale food suppliers. Consider your credit terms carefully, with flexibility in mind, otherwise you could lose an outstanding local supplier.

g) Find Sources that can Supply you with Local Food

As a buyer, you have probably developed relationships with a variety of food vendors and suppliers. However, if you are committed to adding local food to your menus you may need to seek out smaller, local suppliers. Ontario is home to more than 57,000 farms. Ontario's Greenbelt has ensured the protection of millions of acres of productive farming lands. Browse the Online Market at www.Greenbeltfresh.ca for a great list of farmers able to supply the food you need. There are several sites that may be of use and many smaller regions operate their own local farmer's market listings as well. Here is a list of Ontario sources:



Harvest Hastings – <http://www.harvesthastings.ca/producers>

Harvest Ontario – <http://www.harvestcanada.com/>

Homegrown Ontario – http://www.homegrownontario.ca/fs_distributors.php

Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers – <http://www.ontariogreenhouse.com/>

Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers – <http://www.opvg.org/ontario-processors.aspx>

Savour Muskoka – <http://www.savourmuskoka.com/farmers.html?page=3&start=10>

Simcoe County Farm Fresh – <http://www.simcoecountyfarmfresh.ca/route.php>

h) Keep track of your progress and your challenges.

Advertise and celebrate too!

Begin formal tracking of the source and suppliers of your food. This will make it easier to verify that your menu is local and will allow you to show your progress towards purchasing more local food. Maintaining detailed information on the challenges involved with trying to improve your local food purchasing will prove useful for other organizations wanting to follow your lead. It will also be useful for the suppliers to know the challenges institutions face so they can improve their service ensuring that their customers' needs are met. Keeping a journal is a straightforward means of tracking this information.

Another option to help spread awareness is to update your progress by releasing media reports on occasion. Sharing the positives will help other organizations that may be considering a similar shift. Ensure your end users who are eating the local food products are aware of your campaign. This grassroots community can help promote and support further programs as they take hold in communities.

APPENDIX

Sample Food Audit

Type of Food	Invoice No./ Purchase Order	Volume Purchased	Cost	Category	Supplier	Possible to Purchase Locally?	Ask if available Local
Bananas	ARA10788911	20 bunches	\$XXX	Fresh	Aramark	N/A	N/A
Apples	SYS4569870	10 bushels	\$XXX	Fresh	Sysco	Yes	X
Cheddar Cheese	DL7896540	1 case	\$XXX	Dairy	Dairyland	Yes	X
1% Milk	DL45879600	12 L	\$XXX	Dairy	Dairyland	Yes	X
Tomato Paste	ARA4568962	12 cases	\$XXX	Processed	Aramark	Unknown	X

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A Guide to Developing a Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy
www.sustainablefoodpolicy.org

A Guide to Serving Local Food on your Menu
<http://www.glynwood.org/assets/PDF%27s/ReportsandGuides/GuideLocalMenu.pdf>

Best practice in sustainable public-sector food procurement Commissioned by Food Links UK, funded by Defra <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/pdf/foodlinks-bestpractice.pdf>

DIY Guide to Implementing the PSFPI
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/pdf/diy-practitioner-guide.pdf>

Local Food Procurement Policies: A Literature Review by the Ecology Action Centre, 2007.
<http://www.ecologyaction.ca/files/images/file/Food/LocalFoodProcurementPolicies.pdf>



Local Sourcing: Growing Rural Business - Business in the Community
www.bitc.org.uk

Local Sourcing Guide - Opening the Door for Small Business Published by the Institute of Grocery
Distribution (IGD) <http://www.igd.com/index.asp?id=1&fid=1&sid=14&tid=104&cid=552>

New Economics Foundation - New Plugging the Leaks
<http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/about/index.htm>

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Economic Development - City of Toronto

Tarah Young, Green Being Farm



Possibility grows here.

68 Scollard Street, Suite 201
Toronto, Ontario, M5R 1G2
www.greenbelt.ca

For more information contact:
Phone: 416-960-0001
Email: [info at greenbelt.ca](mailto:info@greenbelt.ca)