

April 28, 2020

To Hamilton City Council,

The members of Hamilton's Food Advisory Committee (FAC) are deeply concerned about the disruption of COVID-19 to the food system. Since the committee is unable to officially meet, City Legislative Coordinator Loren Kolar advised that the committee chair and vice-chair may submit a letter to council.

The pandemic has been mired with food-related issues such as food access, seasonal agricultural labour, and food safety. The "health" of the food supply chain could change instantly with unpredictable challenges such as border closures or tariffs that could make food unavailable or unaffordable. Meanwhile, outbreaks in B.C. chicken plants threaten the ability to maintain operations, a problem that could occur elsewhere. Canadian farmers are also questioning their ability to operate through risks of labour shortages, virus outbreaks, and disrupted sales channels.¹ As we continue through the stages of this pandemic to recovery, the local food sector must be considered and consulted.

Other municipalities are recognizing the need to focus on local food production and procurement, and taking action. United Counties of Prescott-Russell council voted on April 22 to build a \$36-million private-public food hub. Stéphane Sarrazin, chair of their economic development and tourism committee, said, "We have learned from the current pandemic situation. Due to the increasing uncertainty across international markets, food self-sufficiency has become more important in terms of availability, freshness and traceability."² The City of Brampton also spearheaded a Backyard Garden Program encouraging residents to grow food to donate to food banks, the first Canadian municipality to launch a citywide garden initiative in response to COVID-19.³ This type of creative initiative leverages community assets to provide a lower-cost solution to the influx in demand for emergency food supports.

As city council forms the Mayor's Task Force on Economic Recovery, we urge you to include stakeholders from the food and agriculture industry, across production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste. We also urge you to consider how tax increases could impact low to middle-income community members and contribute to worsening food insecurity.

While the FAC is not allowed to officially meet under the Procedural By-law and the Municipal Act, we are a group of passionate individuals from diverse representation across the food system including production, distribution, retail and restaurants, and access. Should the city require support on food-related matters, we are ready and willing to assist. These challenging times require unprecedented collaboration, and we are a collective resource available to help.

Wishing you all good health.

Sincerely,

Vivien Underdown, Food Advisory Committee Chair
Elly Bowen, Food Advisory Vice-Chair

¹ <https://business.financialpost.com/news/canadian-farmers-warn-they-may-sit-out-the-season-unless-government-aid-guaranteed>

² <https://www.obj.ca/article/regional-prescott-russell-greenlights-36m-food-hub>

³ <https://www.brampton.ca/EN/residents/parks/Pages/Backyard-Gardens.aspx>