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From Kraft to Craft: innovation and creativity in Ontario's Food Economy

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Introduction

There is a buzz around food, and Ontario has the opportunity to be at the forefront of food innovations. Not long ago Ontario food had a reputation for being bland and tasteless, nothing more than fuel to shovel down at working-day breaks or the dinner table. But times have changed. Many Ontarians have become interested in food again; in the ingredients, in the quality, and in its health benefits. They are also interested in food's capacity to embed local jobs and shape a place's social, environmental and economic sustainability not only through local, organic and biodynamic farming, but through processing and distribution practices that reduce carbon footprints by reducing waste and conserving soil, energy, water, and farmland. For the last ten years, Ontario's food sector has grown by about 2–3% a year, but the creative food economy sub-sector (defined here as local, organic, specialty, and/or ethnic foods) has grown at a much faster rate—estimated to be anywhere between 15% and 25% per year (Specialty Food Report, 2008)¹. Traditional mainstream players also seem to be on board—from new government programs that support the conversion of transition-farming into organic-farming, to large industrial food processors that are now marketing healthier, organic or lighter options. All of this is promising, but much more needs to be done.

This paper argues for a massive step-up campaign by the Ontario government to lead the charge and build the Province's reputation as one of the most innovative,

¹ Because the creative food economy is comprised of related but diverse food sub-sectors, it is difficult to estimate quantitatively a monetary value or market share for the sub-sector. It is possible, however, to understand the market impact of various elements of the sub-sector. Statistics Canada (2008), for example, cites recent studies of the organic food sector, noting that 2006 data suggests that while less than 1% of the \$46.5 billion spent by Canadians on grocery sales in 2006 was for organically-grown food, there was an impressive 28% jump in sales from the previous year. Similarly, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (2008) notes that ethnic foods comprise a significant share of the market—12% of annual retail sales—with 5% annual growth. Similarly, they suggest that the Canadian organic industry is worth \$1 billion with average annual retail sales growth of 20% (ibid.)

sustainable and forward-looking food regions in North America. Ontario's unique heat-unit growing conditions, its reputation for food safety, and its dynamic, multicultural, diverse and talented workforce create the right conditions for growth and change in this industry. In ten years, Ontario's food sector—from field to fork—has the potential to rival the once dominant auto industry as Ontario's great economic, cultural and environmental success story. This paper takes the reader through a journey of how food perceptions have changed in Ontario, what the current industry looks like, and how it can position itself for the future. The author points to evidence of a dynamic and creative consumer-led phenomenon that is inspiring the industry to change for the better. Far from simply a “niche” in the food industry, this paper argues for full-fledged mainstreaming of the creative food economy through innovative and multi-scalar policy solutions led by federal, provincial and local actors.

What is driving the Buzz?

In a 1957 radio interview, Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame told CBC's Joe Taylor that Canada had no cuisine and that there wasn't one dish he particularly enjoyed on his trips across Canada. The Colonel described our food as “plumb tasteless” (CBC 2008). Back then, the prevailing view saw nothing particularly tasty, exciting or innovative about Canadian cuisine. Unlike many southern European countries—or even regions of South Asia and Latin America—Canadians have not developed a shared history or culture around food, engaging in a discussion of how it tastes, where it comes from, how it is grown. Things have changed in recent years, however, as more and more Canadians are thinking and talking about food: what's good to eat, what's in our food, where's it's sourced, and how it's made. Popular food writers like Michael Pollan, with his groundbreaking books, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *The End of Food*, have certainly stoked the conversation, but the conversation had already begun. In Canada, the new dialogue was prompted by growing concerns about both food insecurity (an estimated 8.6% of the population in Canada used food banks in 1994) and food diversity—over 10% of all Canadian online shoppers purchased specialty foods or beverages in 2000 (Tarasuk, 2002, p. 487; White, 2001, p. 49).

Phenomenon like food scares, declining rural communities, rising cultural awareness, and growing public unease around the social and ecological attributes of food are having the effect of motivating more people to eat 'quality' foods. Quality, of course, means something different to everyone. For the quality-seeking consumer of a specific ethnic product, quality may be defined as the ability to find an 'authentic' product from their homeland; for another it may be about consumer products grown locally; for another it may be about buying products free from certain allergens, synthetic additives, pesticides or herbicides regardless of the source. Knowledgeable consumers are searching for something different from what has traditionally been available from mainstream producers, processors or retailers (Donald and Blay-Palmer, 2006). The food studies literature is bursting with debates on the contested and ambiguous nature of 'quality' food (Harvey et al., 2004; Morgan et al., 2006; Kneassey et al., 2007). Terms, for example, like 'alternative', 'specialty', 'authentic' and 'local' are also used to describe food and supply networks of specific ethnic, organic, fair trade or

artisan products. These products may be sourced from anywhere and their suppliers may be different but what they share in common is their appeal to quality-seeking consumers of food. The common thread seems to define quality as having one or all of the characteristics of being tasty, fresh, traceable, authentic and locally produced or sourced.

In many cases, a new 'trust' has emerged between the consumer and their producer or retailer. Whatmore et al. (2003, p. 389) points to evidence of quality networks sharing a new trust between producer and consumer and challenging conventional commodity markets by redistributing "value through the network against the logic of bulk commodity production." The authors suggest that these networks are nourishing "new market, state, and civic practices and visions." In this context, Europe is thought to be years ahead of North American culture in terms of appreciation of quality food products. In some cases, the European 'food quality edge' has "come to be associated with an intensification of differences between (North) American and (Western) European food cultures and politics" (Whatmore et al, 2003, p. 389).

Within North America, numerous "cracks" (i.e., economic, cultural and ethical disjunctures or disruptions) have appeared in the landscape of the traditional agro-industrialized food system (Friedmann, 1995; Pollan, 2006). These cracks—which may include increasing overseas production, energy budget concerns, or ethical resistance to traditional livestock- and chicken-farming and slaughtering techniques—often emerge at the global or national level and ultimately impact local regulations and the individual consumer. On a macro scale, Manning (2004) makes explicit connections between what North Americans eat and wars like that in Iraq. Following the food chain back to the Iraq war he argues that every single calorie that American's eat is backed by about ten calories of oil. North American agriculture is not so much about food as it is "about commodities that require the outlay of so much energy to become food". The current global food crisis has as much to do with the "oil we eat"² in North America as it does with changes in demand arising from the shift in China and India to a more processed North American diet and from the appetites of western biofuels programs that convert agricultural product into fuel. This year America increased the amount of good cropland used for biofuels and the European Union is similarly implementing its own biofuels program. Adding to matters has been more feverish behavior influencing markets, such as export quotas by large grain producers, panic buying by grain importers, and money from hedge funds searching for new markets (*The Economist*, 2008; Irwin, 2008).

Furthermore, Canadian businesses have now felt first hand some of the trade and economic consequences associated with salmonella and listeria outbreaks (e.g., the 2008 Maple Leaf recall), high levels of PCBs in farmed salmon, the controversial use of GMO (genetically modified organisms) crops, and bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or 'mad cow' disease (Warick, 2003). The discovery of BSE in a single breeder cow in Alberta in May 2003 (and the subsequent worldwide ban on Canadian beef products)

² According to the UN World Food Organization, the cost of meeting the target to avert the current food security crisis is \$1.2 billion, which is estimated to be 1% of the US government annual spending on the Iraq war between 2003 and 2007 (Morgan, 2008).

ultimately caused the Canadian beef industry's export market to plummet from a net worth of \$4.1 billion to virtually zero by July of that year (see Poulin and Boame 2003). In addition to these are the cumulative environmental costs associated with the loss of farmland and the rise of water quality concerns linked to industrial farming. For example, the 2004 e.coli outbreak in Walkerton, Ontario—the result of drinking water contaminated by cattle manure—sent at least 160 residents to local hospitals (Ali 2004, p. 2609). As food miles increase (the average distance traveled by a pound of produce is 1,500 miles (Pirog et al., 2001), more roads and trucks are required to transport these commodities. Further up the food chain, retail consolidation is contributing to unsustainable and inequitable land use patterns in the form of sprawling fast-food suburbs and 'food deserts' in urban cores (Wrigley et al., 2003; Morland et al. 2002a, 2002b; Bedore, 2008).

The North American processed food-diet is the food of North America's poor and working class. Research has found that the poor and working class consume the most processed food with the highest proportion of sugar and salt. Hence, they also suffer disproportionately from diet-related health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Morland et al. 2002a, 2002b; Schlosser, 2002). The Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation has called "fat the new tobacco", citing statistics that show that "the increasing number of overweight and obese Canadians now poses one of the greatest threats ever to public health in this country." Thirty years ago, over half of Canadians smoked. Since then, the proportion of smokers has been cut by half. But during the same thirty-year period we have witnessed a 50% increase in those who are overweight and obese. Today 47% of Canadians are overweight or obese, and the health of the next generation is a cause for concern. Incidences of childhood obesity in Canada have almost tripled over the past 20 years, according to a report on health services from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. The prevalence of obesity among seven to 13-year-olds rose from 5% in 1981 to 17% in 1996 for boys and 15% for girls. Canadian children are considerably more likely to be overweight than their English, Scottish, and Spanish peers, according to the *British Medical Journal* (Spurgeon, 2002). The implications of these findings are profound for the future health of the next generation and for the survival of our public health-care system.

Taken together these factors are prompting increasing numbers of people to eat food that is local, organic, tasty, allergen³- or ethnically-appropriate. While some are motivated by the style and status that come with eating specialty foods, many more are moving in this direction because of more fundamental shifts in social, cultural, political and ecological value systems. For example, the Italian-based slow food movement—a blend of politics, social consciousness, taste and sensuality (Murdoch and Miele, 2004; Petrini, 2006, 2007; Waters, 2007)—has caught on in North America Canada, for example, is home to 38 Slow Food International *convivia* (community chapters)—as many as France—among 1,003 chapters internationally (Slow Food International 2008).

³ Sarah Hills "Rise in food allergies raises labeling concerns" *Food Navigator*, October 23, 2008.

This ‘eco-gastronomic’ locavore⁴ movement is seen as an alternative to a fast-paced, fast-food oriented lifestyle (Slow Food Toronto, Slow Food Guelph and Slow Food Niagara to name a few). Volunteer local chapters emphasize saving regional foods and seeds, supporting small producers, and reviving and celebrating taste and sense, something regarded as missing in North American cultural life. ‘Fear of food’ and ‘fear of pleasure’ is something deeply ingrained in North American culture, with some pointing to America’s puritan roots as the reason behind the general distaste on this continent for the pleasures of eating and drinking (Eisen, 1997; Blay-Palmer, 2008).

Indeed, one could even argue that Ontario’s historical lack of any identifiable Ontario cuisine, in conjunction with its particular form of Fordist postwar development (e.g., reliance on mass production and convenient, cost-effective products) provided just the right conditions for the onslaught of American branch-plant food manufactures to take hold in the immediate post-war period, a pattern that continues to dominate the Ontario food landscape today.

The Industry Today

The Ontario food industry is one of the most diverse in the world, producing over 200 agricultural commodities. The Province is known for its work in food technology research and development, and the agri-food sector exports \$8.5 billion worth of commodities annually, accounting for 28% of Canada's total annual agri-food exports. Table 1 disaggregates the cluster in terms of job equivalents and annual revenues. The food and beverage processing sector alone is Ontario’s second largest manufacturing sector, with half of Canada’s top-ranked food and beverage manufacturers headquartered in the city, Toronto is a major decision making centre for the industry.

Table 1: Ontario’s Food Cluster

	Numbers	Jobs	Annual Revenues
Producers	59,728 farms	130,000 job equivalents	\$9.1 billion annual revenues
Food and Beverage and Tobacco	3,500 firms	120,000 jobs	\$32.5 billion annual revenues
Foodservice	36,436 firms	298,200 jobs	\$19.5 billion annual

⁴ Locavore was a word invented by four women in San Francisco who proposed that local residents eat only foods grown or produced within a 100-mile radius and called that dietary concept “locavore”. The idea caught on and in 2007 the new Oxford American Dictionary named “locavore” the 2007 Word of the year.

			revenues
Food Stores	13,731 firms	178,000 jobs	\$24.1 billion annual revenues
TOTAL	113,395 firms and farms	726,200 jobs	\$85.2 billion annual revenues

Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 2006; Ontario, Overview, 2008.

The food processing sector takes advantage of the 400-series highways and supporting infrastructure of warehousing, distribution, retailing and food service. Spin-off industries and services include food packaging, equipment manufacturing, biotechnology, agriculture, specialized storage and transportation (Ontario, Food Processing Overview, 2008). Major multinational food companies operating in Ontario include: AmBev (Labatt), Cadbury Schweppes plc, Campbell Soup Company, Cargill Limited, Coca-Cola Company (Minute Maid), Corn Products International (Casco), Cargill Limited, Ferrero S.p.A., General Mills Inc., H.J. Heinz Company, The Hershey Company, Jungbunzlauer Inc., Kellogg Company, Kraft Foods Inc., Maple Leaf Foods Inc., Mars Incorporated (Effem Foods), McCain Foods Limited, Molson Coors Brewing Company, PepsiCo Inc. (includes Hostess, Frito Lay, and Quaker Oats), Sapporo Holdings Ltd. (Sleemans), Saputo Inc., Unilever, and Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company.

Most of these companies have a long history in Ontario and are deeply embedded in the region. They benefit from strong food sector organizations such as the Food and Consumer Products of Canada, the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors and the Food Processors of Canada. Their voices are reflected in government policies, regulations and funding programs (Ontario, Food Processing Overview, 2008). In 2006, for example, the Ontario government, Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, contributed \$1.7 million to help Ferrero Canada Ltd. implement an employee recruitment strategy for their new 900,000-square foot industrial facility, located on a 170-acre site in Brantford, Ontario. This facility employs 700, making it one of Ferrero’s largest in North America. Products manufactured at the plant include Ferrero Rocher chocolates, Nutella and Tic Tac. The plant exports approximately 75% of its annual production to the U.S. and Mexico. More recently, in March 2008, the Province of Ontario contributed \$9.7 million of the construction and startup costs for Kellogg’s new \$97-million factory in Belleville. The plant will employ about 100 workers and make Mini-Wheats cereal. ⁵

Certainly, Ontario’s particular strength in sugar and high-fructose corn syrup, glucose, and other corn-based sweeteners production also helped to attract this investment. In Ontario, and Quebec, about one-fifth of the total corn produced—at least a third of which is genetically modified—is ultimately used for food and industrial

⁵ Ontario Government. News Release. March 6, 2008. “McGuinty Government Invests In New Manufacturing Plant That Will Create Jobs In Belleville”.

purposes, mostly in the form of by-products such as ethanol, starches, corn syrup, gluten and sweeteners (see Hategekimmana and Beaulieu 2002). Casco (owned by Corn Products International,⁶ which recently agreed to be acquired by Bunge in 2008) has three manufacturing facilities in Ontario that produce High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS), glucose, dextrose, and other corn-based sweeteners (Ontario, Food Processing Overview, 2008). Sweet sodas and diet dishes alike get their base from Corn Products International. The company makes food ingredients and industrial products from corn and other starch-based raw materials. Almost two-thirds of its sales come from sweeteners, including high-fructose corn syrup used to sweeten soft drinks. The company also produces corn starch (a thickener for processed foods), corn oil, and corn gluten for animal feed (Dun and Bradstreet, 2008; Hoovers Industrial Reports, 2008).

Is this a Sustainable Direction?

Yet the extent to which confectionary, sugar and high-fructose corn syrup production is a sustainable direction for Ontario's food economy should raise questions, given consumer trends that point to changing health concerns. Not necessarily directly related to health demands, but nevertheless an important issue, there are also indications of capital leaving the Province due to corporate rationalization and downsizing by other major multinational food players in Ontario—a trend that has drastically affected (but has not been limited to) sugar-related industries. For example, Hershey's is scheduled to close its last remaining Ontario plant in Smith Falls, a town of 10,000 in the eastern part of the province. The December 2008 closing is expected to eliminate 500 direct jobs—a devastating blow to that local economy. The move is part of a global restructuring plan that involves cutting 1500 jobs, over 30% of which are in Ontario (CBC, 2007). Other branch-plants, such as the Campbell Soup Company that is headquartered in the United States, have faced similar downsizing and corporate rationalizations in Ontario.

Campbell's, like many of Ontario's biggest food companies, had its origins in Ontario's permeable Fordist branch-plant manufacturing economy. The New Jersey-based company arrived in Canada in the 1930s and was a typical example of Canada's early twentieth-century import-substitution industrialization strategy. An important element of this strategy was the use of tariffs to protect selected segments of domestic industries and to facilitate the importation of equipment and inputs for them. Because Canada had little in the way of an indigenous manufacturing culture (Gertler, 2004; Britton and Gilmour, 1978), companies with head offices in the UK and US began setting up branch plants so they could sell their consumer goods to the Canadian market (Blay-Palmer and Donald, 2006).

Like Kraft Dinner and Cheez Whiz, Campbell's and its flagship product—Campbell's canned tomato soup—was embraced by Canadian consumers. The product was seen as modern and progressive—a sanitary, easily stored, and convenient food

⁶ Corn Products International was recently acquired by Bunge (July, 2008).

item—symbolic, in fact, of the “best” of postwar, mass-production modern North American society (Parkin, 2003). Pop-artist Andy Warhol captured these daily objects of American Fordist mass production, his 1964 Campbell’s Soup Can silkscreen being one of his most enduring works (Blay-Palmer and Donald, 2006). Other companies have also grown significant market share in Canada, for example, Canadians eat almost 100 million boxes of Kraft Dinner a year, three times more per capita than Americans.⁷

But like many of these American manufacturing branch-plants, employment at Campbell’s Canada peaked in the late 1980s with just over 3,200 workers employed in Ontario and Manitoba. The signing of the 1989 CUFTA and the increasing degree of global competition and continental integration that followed had an impact on Ontario’s economy and US-based branch plants. In the case of Campbell’s, the company reconfigured its Canadian operations to be part of a continentally rationalized, technologically sophisticated production system that decreased the number of product lines manufactured in Canada and the number of employees in Ontario. Today Campbell’s employs 1325 with about 700 in the HQ Etobicoke plant and 625 in the Listowel Plant in Perth region (Dunn and Bradstreet, 2008).

Campbell’s Canada is a very different company than it was 20 years ago. Changing market conditions, increased mechanization, and continental rationalization have reshaped the company and forced new forms of innovation. Recent innovations have included new low-fat, natural-style and low-salt options, and more environmentally friendly packaging as Campbell’s response to new consumer demands in these areas all without compromising its well-known brand. The result of this type of response to the new operating environment was predicted by industry observers: path dependence, evidence by constrained innovative capacity, and incremental innovation (Grabher, 1993). Ultimately, there are fewer Ontario jobs due to the loss of these employers and the emergence of a less stable provincial economy (Blay-Palmer and Donald, 2006).

New, Innovative and Creative Pathways

There is another story in the post-NAFTA food environment in Ontario, based on much different quality and commercial conventions than those described above. It is the story of the newer post-Fordist hybrid food companies that serve a variety of niche markets: from the affluent, to a variety of ethnic and immigrant groups (not all of whom are affluent), to a growing number of people interested in healthier food options, be they students, commitment environmentalists, anti-hunger activists, food allergy sufferers or simply those seeking a healthy lifestyle. Table 2 sets out a conceptual framework for

⁷ Kraft Dinner is labelled as a “Sensible Solution” product because it encourages adding non-hydrogenated margarine and skim milk to the cheese sauce mix. It should be noted, however, that a box of Kraft Dinner “Sharp Cheddar” brand contains among other things, salt, cream, sodium phosphates, flavour, maltodextrin colour (which contains tartrazine), citric acid, monosodium glutamate, modified corn starch, lactic acid, silicon dioxide, calcium lactate, among other ingredients.

distinguishing those features of what may be called the older industrial ‘Kraft’ food economy and a newer, creative ‘Craft’ economy.

Table 2: Relevant Distinguishing Features of Old Food Economy and New Creative Food Economy: from ‘Kraft’ to ‘Craft’

Features	Old ‘Industrial Food’ Economy	New ‘Creative Food’ Economy
Prototypical company	Kraft	Craft/artisanal cheese
Sources of economic power	Economic power is centralized National/international production, processing and marketing Concentrated farms and control of land, resources and capital	Economic power is diffused and decentralized from owners or controllers of means of production to individual, highly creative knowledge-workers and extra-firm institutions Dispersed control of land, resources and capital
Sources of quality and innovation	Quality is a measure of added value in highly-processed environments or incremental innovation in packaging and marketing of existing food products (e.g., 27 different kinds of Oreo cookies)	Quality is a measure of taste, terroir, and talent of entrepreneurs making new and innovative products
Enterprises’ attitudes towards place	Firm or company located close to traditional production inputs like raw land, and transportation networks. Little relationship between place and product making. Preferences for place are subordinate to traditional company inputs.	Traditional production dimension important, but place becomes central to quality food making, marketing and consuming

The new ‘Craft’ economy has profound implications for sustainable economic development as place and providence become central to quality food making, marketing and lifestyle. Moreover, economic power is thought to be diffused and decentralized from owners or controllers of the means of production to individual, highly creative knowledge-workers and extra-firm institutions. Ideally, the control of land, resources and capital are dispersed and quality is a measure of taste, terroir (the attribution of a product’s quality and reputation to its geographic origin) and talent of entrepreneurs making new and innovative productions. The traditional production dimension is important, but place becomes central to quality food making, marketing and consuming (Allen, 2004; Pollan, 2006).

Creativity in Ontario: report on results

The following report is on some of the creative developments—from field to fork—in Ontario’s food industry and is based on an examination of innovative developments across the food chain—everyone from young, new immigrant farmers to retailers, tastemakers and celebrity chefs. Also examined are product innovations including new fusion-food products emerging from the multicultural mosaics of Ontario’s big cities (e.g., Kosher Samosas and Kishki Halal Pizza) and from the rising health, social and environmental awareness in the region. Although these stories do not represent Ontario’s creative food development in its entirety, they speak to the activity in a wide scope of sectors, and represent some of the most interesting case studies from each of those sectors. Case studies were identified from several sources, including Ontario creative food industry/trade show material and over 10 years of empirical research on this industry. Although not representative of the entire sub-sector, the case studies were chosen for their diverse geographic distribution throughout the province, as well as representativeness within the quality, ethnic, organic, local and peanut/nut-free segments of the sub-sector.

On the one hand, the argument can be made that process innovations in the creative food sub-sector is very similar to what has occurred recently in more traditional manufacturing. On the other hand, these innovations are fundamentally different. Both creative and traditional food companies have introduced new equipment or methods to reduce waste and production costs. Most innovative firms, regardless of their size or industrial history, have certainly embraced these new trends.

Peanut/Nut Free Manufacturing: jurisdictional advantage

Dare Foods Limited, a Kitchener-based biscuit, cracker and confectionary company, was established in 1892 and has grown and reconfigured itself over the years to meet the changing needs of consumers. It is a privately owned company with estimated annual sales of \$100 million and an employee count of 1,400. It was also one of the first companies to respond on a large scale to Ontario’s 2006 *Sabrina’s Law*, a groundbreaking initiative to protect anaphylactic students in all public elementary and high schools across the Province. Recognizing a gap in the market a few years before the law took effect, the company began the process of making all three of its Canadian manufacturing facilities peanut- and nut-free. The company now sells its line of cookies, crackers, fine breads and candy throughout Canada and the United States, in Mexico, in Sweden, and in the Far East—over 25 countries in total.

As Dare was one of the first companies in the world to respond to the increase in food-based allergens (especially those related to peanuts), its products are often sold as specialty items in other countries. The highly successful Trader Joe’s retailer in the United States, for example, sells Breton crackers as high-end specialty items given in

part to their peanut- and nut- free status. Dare Foods Limited is growing through its jurisdictional advantage in the peanut- and nut-free market, in part because Ontario was one of the first jurisdictions in North America to implement a food allergen law. Other jurisdictions are expected to follow suit within the next few years. The Province's leadership in this issue in part has inspired other companies, such as Chapman's Ice Cream and Mapleton Organics, to adopt and/or market a "peanut-free" product line.

Local and Organic: finding "new paths" to market

The Mapleton Organics story is fascinating as it very much represents a slower and less mechanized—yet equally innovative—sector of Ontario's creative food industry. Founded in 1999, Mapleton Organics is a local organics and frozen yogurt ice cream company located in Moorefield, Ontario. The company started off in the early 1980s as a conventional farm, drawing on inputs from the chemical-pesticide and artificial-fertilizer industry, but soon realized that this type of farming was unsustainable. The owner, Ineke Booy, explains:

We didn't want to have ... all these chemicals around with children around on the farm because it's a dangerous place. So my husband and I agreed to go organic and we were so happy because we weren't dependent anymore on the corporations who just set the price and that's what you have to pay.

The dairy and grain farm has 600 acres of organic crops and employs six full-time workers, as well as students workers. Ineke explains that before the farm went organic, it was a "very lonely place; only the veterinarian came once in a while." But now they have an on-site ice-cream store, farm tours, and community shared agriculture (CSA). "People come in and they look at the animals, buy some meat or milk or ice cream ... and they feel comfortable ... it's not commercial". Recently Mapleton Organics gave some land to three young farmers to start up a CSA. Mapleton provides them with on-site advice and gives them the land for free "because once a week, the people who have a share in the CSA come and buy meat, milk and ice cream and enjoy the farm." The social economy is what keeps Ineke inspired, as she couldn't imagine "farming the lonely way again." Innovations for Mapleton, like many other small organic and local farms also includes the development of new distribution channels (on-farm, trade shows, music festivals, and a community-shared agricultural buying group) as a way to build product recognition and get their products to consumers.

According to much of the innovation literature, Mapleton's innovations would be considered "incremental" (Christensen, 1997), or gradual and aggregated, similar in kind to those of Dare Foods and others. However, the organic or locally inspired product and distribution innovations are in many ways radical because they aim to produce food outside, and in opposition to, the dominant economic model of mass-produced, formulaic, commodified food (Blay-Palmer and Donald, 2006). Firms like Mapleton, in their efforts to construct an alternative to the conventional market provide a context for closer ties between farmer and consumer. As reflected in an explicit emphasis on

community and the “share” relationship of community-support-agriculture, they also facilitate the decommodification of food (Hinrichs, 2000). That said, there are also tensions—and perhaps opportunities for complementarity—between, on the one hand, a socially embedded economy, in this sense of social connection, reciprocity and trust, and on the other hand, a more conventional market relationship.

Recently, due to consumer demand for their organic ice cream, Mapleton has been grappling with the distribution challenges faced by small and medium-sized companies that wish to retain the ownership and pricing of their product. The increasing prevalence of food retailing distribution-based chains (such as Walmart and Loblaws) is a major challenge for smaller firms like Mapleton. These chains are not only supported by current Fordist-inspired regulatory regimes across North America, but are also reshaping them on many levels, including modes of land use, labour laws and food-quality regulation. A key issue for smaller suppliers is that larger retailers can squeeze the supply chain, making it more difficult for smaller players to maintain their presence in the market and for new players to enter it. Mapleton, which uses the Ontario Natural Food Coop as its distributor, recently made the decision to expand its distribution and sell its product in Sobey’s, largely because Sobey’s gave the firm free shelf-space in the freezer and some control over price. Mapleton was also attracted to Sobey’s because it is still very much a locally owned and community-oriented retailer. Mapleton refused Walmart “for ethical and business reasons” and it is not interested in growing “the company too big”.

In making these decisions, Mapleton sits in the complicated space of opposing yet complementary markets: through its efforts to construct alternatives to the conventional market by going local and organic and building closer social ties between farmers and consumers, Mapleton is also de-commodifying food. On the other hand, Mapleton is responding to consumer demand for local, fresh and sustainable products through the place-based marketing and distribution of its product in a more conventional manner. While doing so, however, it is also improving its economic performance and contributing to the prosperity and sustainability of Ontario.

Beretta Meats and Y U Ranch: sun-based agriculture

Beretta Meats (Beretta Organic Farms Inc.) and Y U Ranch are two other examples of growing companies that contribute to the prosperity and sustainability of Ontario. Beretta Meats, located in King Township, was founded in 1993 by Cynthia and Michael Beretta. The farm grows and sells fresh organic meat and meat products. The company presently has 16 employees and generates annual sales of about \$5 million (Dunn and Bradstreet, 2008). According to the sales manager, Ashlee Ricci, the enterprise has been growing over the last three years because

people are increasingly concerned about where their food is coming from and who’s producing their food. Is it a local producer? How are they going about producing their food? Is it someone in their community? People are also concerned about what goes into their food, whether it’s steroids, antibiotics, preservatives or

artificial flavouring. People have become more invested in what goes into their body and this is turning a lot of people onto us.

Beretta Meats is not only a producer of meats, but also a seller and supporter to other organic and transitioning-to-organic farms in Ontario's Greenbelt—an area surrounding Southern Ontario's Golden Horseshoe Region and extending roughly from Niagara Falls to Oshawa. While not all of Beretta Organic Farm's meat is raised on the farm, the local organic farmers who raise animals for the company and whom they help to support, are required to meet the same stringent organic production standards as those practiced on the Beretta farm, including humane animal rearing practices. The principal component in the rearing of their animals is extensive use of *pasture*. As Beretta explains:

At present almost 200 acres are used for grazing the cattle, sheep, pigs and even poultry. The fresh air and exercise is an obvious advantage but there are quite a few other reasons for grazing animals. Much of the land here in King Township is rolling, and rolling land is not suitable to cropping because of the potential for land erosion. When kept in hay or pasture however, the plant roots hold the soil in place, and the animals do the work of harvesting. They also spread their own manure which is vital in maintaining the fertility of the land, particularly on an organic farm, where chemical fertilizers are not permitted.

Unlike a conventional "factory farm", Beretta Meats does not require the same fossil-fuel energy to produce its products. Beretta's pasture practices challenge our 20th-century addiction to a 'fossil-fuel' diet and put us back on what Michael Pollan has recently called "a diet of contemporary sunshine." This is because Beretta does not use any kind of oil-based fertilizers and pesticides in the rearing or preservation practices of its animals. Unlike factory farms, the older and simpler cattle raising techniques combined with smaller scale production allow the animals on Beretta's farms replenish the nutrients that crops deplete rather than generating new pollution problems from the inputs and outputs of feedlots.

On Bryan Gilvesy's Y U Ranch in Tillsonburg, Ontario, Texas Longhorn cattle also roam freely, feed on natural grasses, and replenish the land. Y U Ranch specializes in the creation of wildlife habitat. This former tobacco farm is part of a shift toward a more sustainable agro-ecological economy that creates economic incentives for farmers to safeguard clean water, prepare or enhance bird habitat, and store excess carbon in the land. The Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) is a farmer-led initiative funded by a myriad of stakeholders such as birders, hikers, anglers, hunters, environmentalists, towns and the Province. For Gilvesy, this means that he has turned eight of his 350 acres over to growing tall grass prairie, the kind of prairie grass that used to cover thousands of acres in the North American Midwest 120 years ago but has all but disappeared. As Roberts (2007) explains,

Above ground, the tall grass provides nesting habitat for a variety of birds in the spring and early summer. Below ground, roots that go down 16 feet stabilize the soil, store carbon and filter water that drips down into the water table. ALUS bought the prairie grass seed and pays Gilvesy \$400 a year to leave the

field alone until mid-July, when the birds migrate elsewhere. After the birds leave, Gilvesy lets his cattle feed on the grass, which ensures their meat is lean and well-priced.

A solar-powered pump also takes water from the stream to the cattle in the field. Rather than using the conventional treatment of chemicals—mixed in diesel fuel and applied to the cattle’s backs—to ward off flies, Gilvesy uses bluebirds.

Y U Ranch beef is certified through Ontario’s new Local Food Plus program⁸ and is sold within a 100-mile radius of Tillsonburg. Currently Y U Ranch does not sell to retailers nor does it deliver outside its territory. Those interested in purchasing longhorn meats are encouraged to visit the ranch. While Y U has carved out a small and unique niche by sequestering carbon and demonstrating the importance of sustainable farming practices, other meat producers—like Beretta—are also helping to reduce their carbon footprint by only delivering regionally. These are regional producers, meaning that their meat is not trucked thousands of miles on inter-provincial highways.

Beretta relies on the internet to sell most of its product, and delivers its meat to customers through a well-planned regional distribution network that aims to reduce the amount of fuel used. “We’ve worked really hard in terms of our logistics and our delivery routes to make sure that it’s, of course, cost-effective as well as effective in terms of our carbon footprint that we’re leaving.” Packaging is also minimal, says the company, “we even have customers that we still butcher-wrap products for because they prefer not to have their products exposed to plastics” (Ricci, 2008).

Beretta has new customers every year, but also it has many long-standing and loyal customers. Trust is the primary reason people buy the Beretta name. One of the challenges facing companies like Beretta, however, is the market confusion that now exists in Ontario with regard to organics and certification. As Ricci explains,

Producers in Ontario have to be certified organic to sell their product, which is a great thing. They get audited—in order to sell a product that is certified organic, they have to be certified by the certifying body. But then the store does not need to be certified. So a store can bring in product and sell it as organic, but there’s no one governing the store right now to make sure the products that they are selling are certified organic [especially private label products]. So there’s a big division there between, if you’re a producer your products have to be certified, but if you’re just a store they don’t...this is one of the things that the industry needs to get caught up on.

⁸ Local Food Plus (LFP) is a non-profit organization that brings farmers and consumers together to share in the benefits of environmentally and socially responsible food production. They are committed to building and fostering local sustainable food systems by certifying farmers and processors and linking them with local purchasers. As of August 1, 2007, their name has changed to Local Food Plus from Local Flavour Plus” Found at <http://www.localfoodplus.ca/> on October 23, 2008.

The different rules and norms for producers versus retailers concerns companies like Beretta since it dilutes the meaning of organic and confuses the customers. “People just want assurance about where their food is coming from and who’s governing the claims that food businesses are making,” argues Ricci.

Indeed, Canada is well behind other jurisdictions in terms of all dimensions of organic standard making and certification. Beretta, for example, is certified through the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), a non-profit charitable organization from the United States founded in 1951 to reduce the sum total pain and fear inflicted on animals by humans. Beretta is still waiting, however, for the AWI to be recognized in Canada as an auditing or certification body. Animal welfare routinely comes to the forefront of organic certification debates, and Beretta, like some meat companies, wants to make sure that animals are treated with dignity and respect, a major customer concern these days.

Many of these new food companies are ahead of the curve not only in terms of sustainability practices, but also in terms of the need for regulatory reform. Fifth Town Artisan Cheese, a new cheese-producing farm in Eastern Ontario is another pertinent example.

Fifth Town Artisan Cheese: reviving a lost economic base in rural Ontario

The Fifth Town Artisan Cheese Company is one of the newest artisanal cheese companies in Ontario. Located on the eastern tip of Prince Edward County, the firm opened its doors to the public in June, 2008. The company is an environmentally and socially responsible enterprise that position itself as a niche producer of fine handmade cheeses using fresh, locally produced goat and sheep milk. The product development processes integrate traditional methods and craftsmanship ethics with local terroir. The processes are more labour intensive and less mechanized than those used for industrial cheese. Unlike industrial cheese processes that inject chemical flavor into the cheese to replicate the aged taste, artisan cheese is made by hand and ages naturally. The 4,200-square-foot Fifth Town dairy processing, retail and educational facility enhances the practice of artisan cheese-making with its advanced sustainable design that implements solar energy, recycled building materials, and a geothermal heating and cooling system. Recently, the Fifth Town Cheese factory was awarded Platinum accredited under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program, making it a pioneer in green construction and North America’s only platinum LEED certified dairy.

Since opening their doors to the public, the owner, Petra Cooper, and her team cannot produce fast enough to keep up with demand. Their products are sold in over 25 establishments on-site, in the County, and in retail outlets in Toronto and Eastern Ontario. Their cheeses were recently awarded the Best Regional Product award at the 2008 TASTE! event in Prince Edward County and have receive accolades from the national press. According to Petra Cooper, there was a lot of resistance among more traditional producers and agro-food regulators to her idea of opening an artisanal cheese company in Ontario:

We were told many times in the early days that we couldn't do an artisan cheese dairy ... It's about putting together a whole lot of variables in a whole different way, doing things that other people are not necessarily doing. It holds a level of risk, too.

A true ecological entrepreneur, Petra Cooper pushes the boundaries of cheese and cheese-regulation-making in Ontario. In 2004, she founded the Ontario Cheese Society, a broadly based society formed to represent the interests of a group of highly dedicated artisan cheese-makers, milk producers, retailers and enthusiasts who experience firsthand the fast-growing consumer interest in farmstead, artisan and regional cheese products across North America. There are presently over 150 members (including 12 cheese-makers as far away as Thunder Bay's Thunder Oak Cheese) and approximately 34 supporting industry members (including retailers and wholesalers). The aim of the society is to facilitate networking and education and also to push toward regulatory reform in Ontario and Canada. The Society supports more transparent labelling of cheese products in Canada so that consumers can easily distinguish between cheeses made from 100% whole, locally produced raw milk (traditional cheese) and cheese made from a mosaic of alternative dairy ingredients like whey powder, whey protein, lactose, milk protein concerns or other fillers and boosters⁹.

While the society pushes for more transparent labeling standards, it also seeks to revive a lost but sustainable economic base in many parts of rural Ontario (see text box 1). Fifth Town Cheese benefits from Prince Edward County's unique regional civic culture that has recently been promoting the regional culinary and wine economy.

⁹ "Canada's New Cheese Regulations and Ontario Cheese Society Response" found at www.ontariocheese.org on October 24, 2008.

Figure 1: Reviving a County Tradition

In the late 1800s, cheese making was an essential skill for farm families in Prince Edward County. With food scarce and the government's allotment of one cow per two families, local farmsteads in those days reserved milk for their children and learned how to make cheese from the excess. Over time, the reputation of these farm families' fine cheeses grew and so did the demand for them. By 1908, there were 26 cheese-making facilities in the region, with cheese production generating about 35% of the income of local dairy farmers. At that high point, Prince Edward County cheese was well appreciated for its quality and "taste of place," stemming from milk produced by cows grazing on local pasture, or hay grown in our unique micro-climate and limestone-rich terrain. Today, however, the local tradition in cheese making has all but disappeared. Currently, there is but one farmer-owned, local cheese dairy remaining—the Black River Cheese Company. Our hope is that together we can once again animate the County's reputation for making great cheese (Fifth Town Artisan Cheese).

Prince Edward County—Ontario's newest culinary destination

From a regional perspective, Prince Edward County has been at the forefront of regional marketing and distribution of the new creative food movement in Ontario—everything from cheese, to wine to fresh fruits and vegetables, breads, chocolates, lamb and beef. Dan Taylor, the local economic development officer for Prince Edward County explains,

I came to Prince Edward County in 2000 and recognized an incredible opportunity to market what was already in place—a vibrant community of culinary creatives making everything from wine to heritage tomatoes to lamb and succulent beef.

Drawing on his experience as a marketing executive from a Fortune 500 company, Dan and his team of marketing creatives went on to develop various events and marketing tools to promote the regional "quality of taste" that is Prince Edward County. Once known as Canada's "Garden County," Prince Edward County is the country's newest wine region and is fast becoming known as the gastronomic *capital* of Ontario.¹⁰ To achieve this hallmark—a "rural renaissance" embedded in a wider framework of becoming a rural creative economy (Prince Edward County, 2008)—the County has successfully capitalized on its favourable climate and its location within the 'golden triangle' (Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto) to create a thriving agro-tourism industry based on the region's food history and its contemporary strengths in wine-making, regional cuisine, small farming, and fresh produce. These attractions continue to attract entrepreneurs, tourists and new residents alike. The region is rich in farm fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, grains and wines. Many world class chefs are moving to the region and delight in using the local agricultural bounty in their gourmet dishes. The

¹⁰ Mercedeh Sanati, 'Gastronomic Capital of Ontario' honours go to Prince Edward County, *Globe & Mail*, June 21, 2008.

County celebrates its regional cuisine and wines with festivals and fairs and great places to sample, from roadside stands to fine restaurants. Some of the star chefs that are making Prince Edward County home include Jamie Kennedy, Michael Potters, Michael Sullivan, and one of newest—husband-and-wife team Scott Kapitan and Jacqui Vickers from The Bloomfield Carriage House Restaurant in Bloomfield, Ontario. For Scott Kapitan, a desire to have a closer connection to high-quality products was a major reason for opening a restaurant in Prince Edward County,

[T]here is a developing food community here that is very exciting. Farms, wineries and restaurants are working together in such a way that has a wholesome feel to it. Where else could I go and have access to organic duck, geese, lamb, and boar.¹¹ Not to mention farmers' food stands along every county road.

Buddha Dog™ is another award-winning innovative restaurant that draws on the region for its inspiration. Reader's Digest recently voted it the "best hot dog in Canada". The idea of the restaurant is "to bring together the best local suppliers—farmers, dairies, bakers, butchers, chefs—to make an exceptional hot dog and let it represent the best of their region and culinary tradition." On July 1st, 2008 Buddha Dog celebrated its third anniversary with visitors from around the world.

Culinarium™

Prince Edward County's regional distribution and marketing techniques helps entrepreneur Kathleen MacKintosh promote her new retail concept, Culinarium™, which she describes as "a unique gourmet food store in Mid-Town Toronto that showcases exceptional Ontario products and the passionate people behind them." Culinarium™ offers a range of organic, natural, artisanal and sustainably produced products, ranging from preserves to snacks, cheeses to meats, non-perishables to frozen items. The one thing their products have in common is that they are all locally produced. For example, The grass-fed beef comes from a herd of Texas longhorn cattle raised at the aforementioned YU Ranch. The grass-fed lamb is from Kupecz Family Farms in Stirling. Both items are local-food plus (LFP) certified—raised in socially and environmentally responsible ways (Honey, *Toronto Star* 2008). Culinarium's™ motto is "All Ontario, All the Time" and Figure 2 highlights some of the products they have in store. Culinarium™ also provides cooking classes and food training for interested customers. Much of their education revolves around re-introducing lost food knowledge to Ontarians, such as fresh fruit canning and yeast breads for beginners. As MacKintosh notes, there is a huge pent-up demand for learning about food and food preparation, largely because the Ontario education system has failed to provide any teaching or learning in this area. Across Canada, in fact, "home economics" and cooking was removed from the high-school curriculum in the 1980s, leaving a generation that knows virtually nothing about nutrition and food preparation.

¹¹ Farms like Boars of Babylon, Graham farm and Vader farm lamb to provide example.

Figure 2: Sample of Ontario products carried by Culinarium™.

Red Fife, Spelt, Buckwheat and Wheat Flours from Thornloe and Bruce County
Artisan Cheese from Stratford, Picton, Niagara, Conn and as far away as Thunder Bay
Cured Nitrate Free Charcuterie from Niagara
Lamb and Whole Chicken from Stirling
Honey from Aylmer and Delhi
Omega-3 Pork from Mitchell
Award winning **Butter** from Stirling
Frozen Wild Fish caught on Lake Huron
Peanuts and Peanut Butter from Vittoria—yes, peanuts do grow in Ontario and our customers say they are the best darn peanuts they've ever tasted!
Gourmet Jams from Muskoka, Kawartha, Manitoulin Island, Niagara-On-The-Lake
Condiments from Stratford, Milton, Orillia, Markham, Toronto
Pickles from Thamesville, Flesherton and Sudbury
Vinegars from Niagara, Tillsonburg and Hamilton
Cold Pressed Oils from Waterford
Mustard from Merrickville
Birch Syrup from Thunder Bay
Dried Fruit from Vineland Station and Bala
Maple Syrup from Kawartha and Grimsby
Herbal Teas from Muskoka and Algonquin Park
Juice from 100% Ontario fruit from Wellesley, Vittoria
Ontario Garlic from Stratford
Saskatoon Berry Pie from Stratford—yes, Saskatoons do grow in Ontario!

Ethnic Foods for all Seasonings

Culinarium™ has chosen to focus more on organic, natural, artisanal and sustainably produced products from mostly rural parts of Ontario. There is, however, a corresponding explosion of ethnic foods being created and produced in Ontario, especially in the dynamic and multicultural City of Toronto and its surrounding environs. There are presently 2.78 million ethnic consumers in Toronto and Southern Ontario who seek out familiar home-land foods that, until recently, were not being produced in Canada. This, coupled with an urban mainstream who seek more healthy and adventurous cuisine, is leading to a demand for ethnic and cross-cultural food products. The Greater Toronto Area alone consists of 41% of Canada's three million immigrants. There are more than 170 different ethnic groups in Toronto and almost 100,000 immigrants move to Toronto each year.¹² This makes the ethnic and specialty food market particularly strong in Toronto as the many multi-ethnic communities provide a nurturing ground for the rapidly growing specialty food sector. According to the City of Toronto, about **25%** of all food processing plants within Toronto are making specialty products. Specialty foods have grown about twice as fast as the average for the food cluster and are expected to grow at 12% a year in the coming five years—compared to **5%** for the rest of the cluster.¹³

Mr. Goudas: the pioneer

Mr. Goudas—a company founder and now a well-known brand name—was one of the first and perhaps Toronto and Ontario's most recognized ethnic food producers. His story is fascinating because it speaks to the role of the entrepreneur in food cluster formation. Mr. Spiros Peter Goudas is a Greek immigrant and trained aircraft engineer who came to Toronto in 1967, with approximately \$100 in his pocket and no knowledge of English. He began working three jobs to make ends meet and soon opened his first food store in Kensington market in downtown Toronto. The store initially catered to the Greek community (Pallas Meat Market), but Mr. Goudas quickly realized that his consumers were multicultural—Latin, Caribbean, Asian, European, Jewish—so he changed the store to accommodate different nationalities and religions. He soon realized the importance of learning the eating habits, norms and religions of his multicultural clientele and eventually went on to incorporate Goudas Foods Products and Investments Limited in 1971. By 1977, Mr. Goudas products were on the shelves of a No Frills¹⁴ grocery store in Toronto.

¹² Statistics Canada. Agriculture and Agri-food Canada Food Bureau Report. *Influence of Immigration on the Ethnic Food Market in Canada*; Current Trends. Organic Trade Association; Toronto Fact Sheet, www.city.toronto.on.ca, accessed October 24, 2008.

¹³ City of Toronto. Toronto's Key Industry Clusters. www.toronto.ca/economic_profile/food.htm, accessed October 24, 2008.

¹⁴ No Frills is a subsidiary of Loblaws, Canada's largest food retailer.

Mr. Goudas was a leader in terms of self-organizing the ethnic and multicultural foods cluster in Toronto. In 1975, he was a key sponsor of the first Caribana Festival, celebrating the culture and diversity of peoples from the Caribbean. During this period he was also sponsoring other multicultural events, and he was active in lobbying for government initiatives that collectively formed “multicultural policy” in Canada.

While Mr. Goudas was working with other enterprises, institutions and resources to enhance the profile of his multicultural foods in Toronto, the ethnic foods ‘cluster’ was in its infancy. Implicit government programs of immigration expansion (e.g., the removal of quotas in 1962) and multicultural policy (e.g., the funding of cultural and “heritage” activities through the 1970s) probably did more to facilitate the formation of this ethnic food cluster than did any explicit food policies. By the late 1980s, the formal federal and provincial food policy machinery was more concerned with addressing restructuring in the food branch-plant processing industry associated with the continental rationalization of production than it was with promoting new types of food production. Although many of these food companies (like Mr. Goudas) were growing, more conventional food processing branch-plants were shrinking.

Over the last few years, however, there has been more government interest in the promotion of the ethnic and specialty food industry in Toronto. The specialty-food sector is the second-fastest growing (about 9% per annum) in Toronto (behind new small- and medium-sized enterprises), and is expected to be the fastest growing sector over the next five years with a projected growth of 12% (Bohl and Bulwick, 2002). These firms appear to be developing significant niche markets for value-added specialty-food products. The diverse demand has arisen in part from multiethnic communities designing new, culturally appropriate quality products, but also from a growing health consciousness in the city (Bohl and Bulwick, 2002). This interest has coincided with the innovative entrance of new ethnic food producers and processors in the region.

Ethnic goes healthy and organic: the new young woman entrepreneur

Many of the newer, more innovative ethnic start-ups are integrating healthy ingredients with ethnic flavours. Preena Chauhan’s Arvinda’s is a case in point. The company was founded in 2005 and sells a line of authentic, fresh and wholesome cooking ingredients for Indian cuisine to restaurants, chefs and retail outlets. The store’s objectives are to motivate people to cook and to make Indian cooking easier and less time-consuming. The company is named after Preena’s mother, Arvinda Chauhan, owner and instructor of Arvinda’s Healthy Gourmet Indian Cooking School in the Greater Toronto Area since 1993. Arvinda’s cooking classes stress the healthier side of Indian cooking using fresh and wholesome ingredients and spices. According to the company founder, Preena Chauhan, “one of the major premises of the company is local and seasonal. We try to use as many high-quality local spices as possible” (their garlic comes from a garlic co-op in Statford, for example). However, they also strive to promote sustainable practices in South India, where most of the world’s high-quality Indian spices are grown.

Anita Saini's Devya Indian Gourmet is another example. Her Indian simmer sauces are the first Indian food products in Canada to become certified organic. Last year *Food in Canada Magazine* recognized her as one of Canada's top 10 innovators and her products are found in over 670 major health food and retail chains across Canada and the United States. According to Saini, consumers are more interested in organic offerings as they become more aware of the health benefits an organic diet provides. "Right now, you can find so many products that are conventional and then you can find the same version in organic. You can buy ketchup, soup, cereal, but we haven't gotten to the point where you can find curry sauce or soy sauce that's organic," Saini said. "I think the growing appetite for multicultural foods has to do with fact that we're so diverse in our population. Influences of other cultures are bound to spill over. I think Canadians, in general, are open to exploring global culture and food."

Susur Lee, Creativity and 21st Century Cosmopolitan Cuisine

This openness to exploring global culture and food is shared by some of Toronto's most celebrated chefs, such as internationally renowned Susur Lee. His creativity and food innovations are successful in such multicultural spaces as Toronto and New York City. As Susur remarked,

North American cities like Toronto are extremely creative because they have an 'anything goes,' open society mentality. The spaces of Toronto have allowed me to take cultural traditional 'roots' and fuse my cooking. I am not a big fan of the label "fusion cuisine" as it implies that you only have a superficial knowledge of other cultures. Quite the contrary, true innovative cooking comes from a deep understanding of, and respect for, different cultural roots and certain openness to new ideas. This is in contrast to the rigidity of more traditional cooking cultures like the French and Southern European ... What I find so exciting about Toronto and North American urban society in general is the possibility for the betterment of the human condition through experiencing on a daily basis differentness and diversity.

Like many top chefs in the City, Susur's kitchens are a laboratory of invention where new ideas and new tastes emerge. They are also the training grounds for new and aspiring chefs to eventually open up their new restaurants or spin-off new food-related projects. James Chatto, perhaps Canada's most celebrated restaurant writer, is very optimistic about the future of Toronto restaurant scene and had this to say about the unknown 30-somethings that are now making their debut,

It looks as though the next generation of chefs has finally found the self-confidence (and backing) to cook for itself...Specific delights abound.

Top new restaurants in the City such as Lucien, Colborne Lane, One, Chrystal Five, Greg Couillard's Spice room, L'Unità, Amaya and Marben compete alongside celebrated and established places like Eigensinn Farm, Spendido, Senses, Scaramouche, Bistro Bakery Thuet, Via Allegrao, Rain, Chiado, North 44°, Canoe, Rundles, Perigee,

Sushi Kaji, Jamie Kennedy Wine Bar, Lai Wah Heen, Didier, George, II Mulino, and Amuse-Bouche. Moreover, those carving out a niche for women in the traditionally male-dominated world of the elite kitchen include Suzanne Baby of Gallery Grill—the “high priestess of lunch”—and Joanne Yolles, pastry chef of Pangaea, for “dessert nonpareil”.

In addition to these more exclusive spaces of the urban foodscape, Toronto has a plethora of affordable, high quality restaurants that feed a variety of tastes from Addis Ababa’s African cuisine to Anh Dao’s Indochinese offerings to Banjara Indian and Sri Lankan Cuisine. The suburbs surrounding Toronto are also emerging as places for high quality ethnic cuisine—especially Indian and Chinese. According to one Chinese Restaurant owner,

The Greater Toronto Area has better quality Chinese food than that found in Hong Kong, not only because of the density of Chinese customers in the city-region but also because of the proximity to fresh ingredients from surrounding farms.

These restaurants, in conjunction with a rich institutional mix of food training schools (George Brown College), public food terminals (The Toronto Food Terminal), blog writers, food trade fairs, and magazines and television shows (The Food Network, etc.), allow Toronto’s chefs and restaurants to shine, experiment, and compete with the best in the world. This institutional mix is difficult to match internationally, and is particularly rich owing to the prevalence of educational institutions, popular/cultural food facilities, industry-level supports and immigrant-driven ethnic culinary communities. As such, Toronto is known the world over for its innovative and diverse cuisine, which attracts talent and people into the City. Moreover, many of the chefs and those active in the food culture witness firsthand the contradictions and ambiguities of the spaces they inhabit. For many of them, Toronto and Ontario’s unfortunate homelessness and poverty situation force them into reflecting and acting on better ways to feed the most vulnerable in our society. Many, for example, donate their time to fundraising events for the less fortunate. ‘Toronto Taste’ is an annual fundraising event for Second Harvest, a non-profit organization that every day picks up donated, high quality fresh food (that would otherwise go to waste) and delivers it to 250 social service programs in the city. According to Second Harvest, its efforts provide “about 15,000 meals a day to children in breakfast programs, seniors on fixed incomes, women fleeing domestic abuse, people with mental illness, homeless people and many others who have fallen on hard times.” It receives no ongoing funding from the Government or United Way, but relies instead on donations and fundraising.

‘Yuppie Chow’ or Sustainable Food Revolution?

Those passionate about high quality food are often dismissed in the academic and mainstream press as elite “foodies” who are more interested in constructing a cosmopolitan identity, a tension-filled existence between democracy and distinction.

There are certainly elements of style and status that go along with consuming good food. But regardless of whether the criticism is essentially valid, there is undeniable evidence that the food system is fundamentally changing in response to values of sustainability, social inclusion and ecological balance.

In terms of indicators of ecological improvement, we have discovered a host of actors along the food chain (including the ones mentioned above) who are concerned about a variety of environmental issues. Jamie Kennedy is one such actor—an activist-chef who not only oversees his restaurants but also is concerned with “big picture” issues that focus entirely on food: where it comes from, how it’s grown or raised, and how to ensure its integrity for future generations. In 1989, he and famed chef, Michael Stadtländer, formed an alliance of environmentally concerned chefs and local organic farmers called Knives and Forks.

We had an organic market that convened once per week, and an annual event called Feast of Fields that was a harvest celebration, held in a rural location that symbolized the relationship between chefs and farmers.

Kennedy is also a supporter of slow food and measures to raise awareness of threats to marine ecosystems for pollution and over-fishing.

Previous research on Toronto’s creative food economy discovered spaces of social inclusion in the new food economy including improved opportunity for interaction with diverse communities, improved access to quality food, improved urban-rural connections, and better labour conditions and prospects.¹⁵

As Donald and Blay-Palmer (2006) have argued,

Part of the process of negotiating new spaces is ensuring that we do not conflate food with a positive logic of inclusive multiculturalism. Food is one of the most affirming dimensions of cultural identity, and is often the first and only point of contact that many in mainstream Canadian society have with ethnically diverse and racialized Canada. Mainstream Canadians’ exposure to ethnic food does not necessarily build tolerance, acceptance, or an embracement of other cultures and ethnicities. However, these spaces of cultural food expression in Toronto are opportunities to engage individuals in intercultural living and learning, an important aspect of building a more inclusive community grounded in respect for differences.¹⁶

The City of Toronto, through its Toronto Food Policy Council, has also been very active at making more explicit connections between food security, defined as the right of every citizen to access adequate quantities and quality of culturally appropriate food every

¹⁵ For more detailed discussion see Betsy Donald and Alison Blay-Palmer (2006) “The Urban Creative-food Economy: producing food for the urban elite or social inclusion opportunity” *Environment and Planning A*, 38, pp. 1901-1920.

¹⁶ Donald and Blay-Palmer (2006), pp. 1911-1912.

day, and Canada's multicultural heritage. Toronto, in fact, is considered a North American leader in food security. The City of Toronto's Plan has institutionalized food security and as such Toronto has a policy basis to advocate for food rights. This has translated into healthy and culturally appropriate food for many Torontonians. Through NGOs, people in Toronto are gaining access to better quality food. As one NGO official explained:

Our intent is to help poor people get access to local [and quality] food. We provide 4000 fresh fruit and vegetable boxes per month. The boxes are subsidized. We address the issues of hunger.

The foodbox program is one mechanism through which urbanites can reconnect with rural producers of food, our third indicators of social inclusion. Venues such as farmers' markets, community-shared agriculture, and foodbox programs are all helping to accomplish this goal.

The final indicator of opportunities for social inclusion through the creative food economy concerns labour conditions. North America's food industry in general has always faced criticism for its labour practices. The industry is labour-intensive with recruitment and retention a top concern for most food operators. In Ontario, the labour-turnover rate is high and the recruitment and retention challenges great. The workforce overwhelmingly consists of women, youth, and visible minorities with no postsecondary education and incomes below the regional and national average. Most are employed on a part-time basis with little or no job security.

The industry by its very nature has many low-skilled entry opportunities, but it has also been deskilled over the years. One of the reasons for this deskilling has been the gradual replacement of labour with capital-intensive technology in food processing and preparation (City of Toronto 2004). In contrast to the more conventional food industry, many enterprises (but certainly not all) involved in the creative food economy actually require greater labour involvement in food pre-harvest and postharvest, processing and preparation. In some cases this opens up the possibility for even greater labour exploitation. In other cases, however, it presents an opportunity to re-skill workers in the food sector. Shasha Navazesh owner of ShaSha Bread, is not only passionate about artisan organic bread and baked goods, but he is also a leader in Ontario with regard to pushing for the re-skilling and retraining of workers in the new food economy. As founder and Chair of the Artisan Bakers' Quality Alliance (ABQA), Navazesh has partnered with the Ontario Rural Economic Development Program to support skills development in the bakery industry.

Implications of this Research for Better Food Policy in Ontario

Those passionate about food and food research are inspired because food, unlike any other commodity on the planet, is intimate: we eat it and therefore how we eat it has implications for a host of policy related issues around job creation, health, hunger,

ecosystem protection, carbon footprint, labour practices, cultural awareness and diversity. As Kevin Morgan so eloquently states, “food is a *prism* through which we can explore the scope and complexity of many of our most pressing economic, social and ecological issues”. Once we understand this, we can begin to make significant policy change. This section of the paper reviews some of the best measures Ontario could take to improve its food system. In making these recommendations, we draw on the ideas of people active in promoting a more sustainable and just food system.

Ontario needs a Ministry of Food, not a ministry that focuses on agricultural commodities from a strictly rural development perspective, but a ministry oriented toward food from a health, ecological, social, cultural and economic perspective. A ministry that considers the entire food chain—from field to fork to waste—can adopt broader policies around the social, health, economic, and environmental benefits of quality food. Examples of these policies are better labeling regarding food safety and content, greater supply-side capacity for locally produced food and a healthier food-choice environment. This idea is not new; leading food and economic development experts have been promoting these ideas for years. With strong and increasing public interest, now is the opportune time to make this change.

A holistic perspective on Ontario’s food economy would **also** view agriculture and food as part of the solution to problems of obesity, social exclusion, food safety and security, declining rural communities, and climate change. Although the successful negotiation of these concerns represents an end in and of itself, dealing with Ontario’s population and health problems through the creative food economy will also bolster economic productivity in the province. In a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, Michael Pollan makes a compelling case for what a 21st-century food system needs to do:

[A] food policy must strive to provide a healthful diet for all our people; this means focusing on the quality and diversity (and not merely the quantity) of the calories that ...agriculture produces and ...eaters consume. Second ...policies should aim to improve the resilience, safety and security of our food supply. This means promoting regional food economies both [here] and around the world. And lastly ...policies need to reconceive of agriculture as part of the solution to environmental problems like climate change (Pollan, 2008)¹⁷.

Pollan argues that these goals—while ambitious—are achievable if “One Big Idea” is held constant:

most of the problems our food system faces today are because of its reliance on fossil fuels, and to the extent that our policies wring the oil out of the system and replace it with the energy of the sun, those policies will simultaneously improve the state of our health, our environment and our security.

¹⁷ For Michael Pollan’s brilliant piece read “Farmer in Chief”, *The New York Times Magazine*, The Food Issue, October 12, 2008, found at www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine.

We have borrowed liberally from Pollan's three main recommendations but also tailored them to some of the particular challenges of the Ontario situation. He groups his recommendations into three main themes: (1) "resolarizing the farm", (2) "re-regionalizing the food system," and (3) "rebuilding a food culture". We argue that all three of these ideas are compatible with what Richard Florida has been calling for: a new "spatial fix" for our cities and towns that depends much less on the Fordist post-war infrastructure of the car and sprawl and more on a hybrid Post-Fordist multicultural and ecological economy and society.

Resolarizing the Ontario Farm

Ontario is fortunate because of its diversity of farmland, but much more needs to be done to encourage farmers to produce as wide a variety of crops and animal products as possible. This is because, as we have demonstrated with our examples of Y U Ranch and Beretta Farms, greater diversity of products on a farm reduces the need for both fertilizers and pesticides. As Michael Abelman¹⁸ has discovered, countries, namely China, Argentina and Brazil, have cleverly used polycultures to produce large amounts of food from little more than soil, water and sunlight. In Argentina, for example, farmers have traditionally employed eight-year crop rotations of perennial pasture and annual crops without the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

The Province of Ontario should be congratulated for contributing to programs like the Alternative Land Use Services and supporting transition-farming into organic-farming. Now the Province needs to think of ways of scaling up these programs so that more farmers can be encouraged to diversity their farms and improve the ecological integrity of the landscapes. In addition to rewarding farmers for preserving and enhancing the land, the Province also needs to make it easier for them to apply compost to their fields.

This is where initiatives of municipal composting of food and yard waste come into play. Ontario and its municipalities need to find ways to better encourage composting of food and yard waste and then distributing the compost free to area farmers. There is growing evidence that this practice will not only improve the fertility of the soil, hold water, and therefore withstand drought, but also boost the nutritional quality of the food grown in it.

Part of moving toward a more sustainable, solarized system will require more people growing food. Ontario's rural population has been declining and the average age of the Ontario farmer today is 53 years old. It is not realistic to expect the older generation of farmers to embrace a complex ecological approach to agriculture. But the

¹⁸ Michael Abelman is an American author, organic farmer, educator, and advocate for sustainable agriculture. He is founder the Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens, California and author of several books including *From the Good Earth, On Good Land and Fields of Plenty: A Farmer's Journey in Search of Real Food and the People Who Grow It*. He lives with his family on an organic farm on Saltspring Island, British Columbia.

Province can focus on training younger generations in ecological farming systems. Ontario needs to encourage more groups like Farm Start, an innovative organization with an objective to support and encourage a new generation of farmers to develop locally based, ecologically sound and economically viable agricultural enterprises. There is a small but growing back-to-the-land movement of a younger generation starting farms. They are motivated not by nostalgia for Ontario's agrarian past but by a need for food security, ecological integrity and economic development.

Embracing food security also requires Ontario to preserve every acre of farmland and make it available to new farmers. Just as Ontario has policies that protect provincially significant wetlands and culturally significant areas, we need to erect barriers to the loss of good agricultural land to other uses. Pollan recommends that real-estate developers do a "food-system impact analysis before development beings". He also suggests "tax and zoning incentives for developers to incorporate farmland (as they now do "open space") in their subdivision plans; all those subdivisions now ringing golf courses could someday have diversified farms at their center." For some great examples of subdivisions that incorporate diverse farmland, Ontario could look to some existing examples in other jurisdictions, such as Fairview Gardens in California, or even general practices—such as urban gardening techniques in other jurisdictions.

Re-regionalizing the Food System

The Ontario government could help build an infrastructure for a regional food economy, a regional system to support diversified farming, shorten the food chain and reduce the carbon footprint. There is mounting evidence that local food is fresher and requires less processing, making it more nutritious. Moreover, local food systems can better withstand food contamination simply because of the scale factor: the bigger and more global the trade in food, the more vulnerable the system¹⁹.

As in many other parts of the world, there is a soaring demand in Ontario for local and regional food. Farmers' markets, innovative farmer-grown home delivery programs, community gardens and community-supported agriculture are just some of the examples of activities that have sprung up in Ontario towns and cities over the last few years. Most of these grass-roots and entrepreneurial initiatives have started without support of government. The recently announced Ontario Market Investment Fund²⁰ is a step in the right direction, but there are things that the Province could be doing to encourage more of this type re-regionalization.

¹⁹ Witness the recent Maple Leaf Foods listeria crisis that cost 20 lives across Canada and the melamine crisis in China.

²⁰ The recently announced OMIF (Ontario Market Investment Fund) guidelines provide \$12 million over 4 years and focused on supporting the development of local food systems/networks, and promoting the consumption of local food, etc. Small producers are eligible for funding, in partnership with at least one other producer.

First, the Province could provide grants to towns and cities to build year-round indoor farmer's markets, much like the St. Lawrence Market in downtown Toronto, or the Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, Pike Place in Seattle or Vancouver's Granville Island Market. To supply these markets, the Province could provide grants to rebuild local distribution networks to minimize the amount of energy used to move produce within local foodsheds. The St. Lawrence market, for example, recently registered on the radar of *Food and Wine* magazine as one of the top 25 markets in the world (see von Bremzen, *Food and Wine*, 2004), and providing grants to other urban markets in Ontario would increase this type of recognition.

Second, the Province could implement Agricultural Enterprise Zones of the type that can facilitate small-scale production and retail operations that otherwise might be caught in a regulatory framework designed for large-scale industry.

Third and closely related, the Province could support the city of Toronto's funding request for a food business incubator centre – The International Food Processing, Innovation and Commercialization Centre. This centre encourages the co-location of food research and development, small and medium-size creative food producers and retail and sustainability (with 7 acres of rooftop urban greenhouses proposed!). The Centre is modeled on very successful centres in urban United States. This International Food Processing, Innovation and Commercialization Centre is an extremely exciting development for the Province and should be supported by as many levels of government, private businesses and community groups as possible. This project has the potential to be a showcase of food innovation for the world.

Fourth, the Province should establish a local meat-inspectors corps. This could be modeled after a successful pilot program on Lopez Island in Puget Sound, Washington, that saw the introduction of a fleet of mobile abattoirs that travel farm to farm, processing animals humanely and cheaply. As Pollan notes, "Nothing would do more to make regional, grass-fed meat fully competitive in the market with the feedlot meat". It could also potentially revive some lost economic activity in many parts of rural Ontario where the land resource and growing season support beef production more readily than market garden or fruit production. A recent study by Blay-Palmer et al. (2006)²¹ found evidence of a declining local beef industry that could potentially be reversed if a fleet of mobile abattoirs were introduced, among other policy directives.

Fifth, the Province could embrace a regional public procurement policy. As Kevin Morgan has recently argued in his paper, "The Politics of the Public Plate," there is a huge potential to shift our food system if Ontario actually required (like they now do in many parts of Europe) some minimum percentage of government food purchases—whether for school-lunch programs, hospitals, prisons, universities—to producers located with the Province. Ontario could create incentives for those institutions (like

²¹ See Alison Blay-Palmer, Mike Dwyer and Jennifer Miller (2006). Sustainable Communities: building local foodshed capacity in Frontenac and Lennox-Addington Counties through improved farm to fork links. A report submitted to the Frontenac and Prince Edward, Lennox and Addington Community Futures Development Corporations, March 21, p. 12. <http://www.frontenaccfdc.com/downloads/Sustainablecommunities.pdf>

Universities, Public Schools and Hospitals) receiving provincial funds to buy fresh local products (and Ontario produced food products).

Rebuilding Ontario's Food Culture

Improving Ontario's food economy requires changes in daily life practice which are now deeply implicated in the economy and culture of fast-food, unhealthy food. Indeed, making available more healthy and sustainable food options does not guarantee that they will be eaten, but Ontario has the tools to promote a new culture of food that is more healthy and sustainable – and most significantly – can embed local jobs and keep Ontario communities vibrant.

For one, we can begin with our children. Food education must be an integral part of the public education curriculum in Ontario schools. Fashioned after Alice Water's "edible education" concept in California, many schools in Ontario are already doing some very exciting things with respect to food education. Central School, a public elementary school in Kingston, Ontario, has had a parent-led edible education program for several years. On the premise that eating is a critical life skill, Ontario must now teach all primary-school students the basics of growing and cooking food and then enjoying it at shared meals. A Province-wide school meals program in Ontario would involve planting gardens in every primary school, building fully equipped kitchens (many primary schools already have them and they are vastly underused), training a new generation of chefs to cook and teach cooking to children. Michael Pollan goes one step further and recommends a "School Lunch Corp program that forgives student loans to culinary-school graduate in exchange for two years of service in the public-school lunch program". Ontario could do the same.

In Rome, Italy, the Mayor implemented a school-meals program that is the envy of the world. Children eat not only local pasta from the surrounding food shed but also eat fair trade chocolate and bananas from around the world. The children correspond with children from the producing countries and learn about their lives.

We also need to step up the campaign for a healthier food choice environment. There is mounting evidence that a poor diet consisting of fat and salt contributes to obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart attacks.²² A public-health crisis of this magnitude calls for a blunt public health message, even at the expense of offending the more traditional food industry that dominates the policy- and regulation-making in Ontario.

To conclude, Ontario has the potential to put the interests of the Province's farmers, families and communities ahead of a fast-food, unhealthy food culture. It can support a crop of new creative and multiethnic food entrepreneurs who are seeking to

²² According to a study reported in the October 20th, 2008 edition of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, the typical Western diet accounts for about 30 percent of heart attack risk across the world. The study examined dietary patterns in 52 countries.

promote and sustain an aspect of urban life that enhances individual and society growth. It can educate and feed our children good, nutritious food. It can assist those new creative food enterprises and organizations in reversing the misfortunes of the declining rural community, contribute to an urban multicultural renaissance, and improve the health of the population and land. In these challenges economic times, everyone still has to eat and we need to find ways to embed our local economy while at the same time make it a sustainable one for future generations. Ontario is well-positioned to be at the forefront of change and build the Province's reputation as one of the most innovative, sustainable and forward-looking food regions. It can cast off old dependencies and embrace the future of the economy with food. The ingredients are there, the entrepreneurial spirit exists, the Province just needs the right recipe.

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This working paper is part of the *Ontario in the Creative Age* series, a project we are conducting for the Ontario Government. The project was first announced in the 2008 Ontario Budget Speech, and its purpose is to understand the changing composition of Ontario's economy and workforce, examine historical changes and projected future trends affecting Ontario, and provide recommendations to the Province for ensuring that Ontario's economy and people remain globally competitive and prosperous.

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