

# Regain Control of Your Food Choices: Build Your **Local Organic** Food Strategy



Canadian Organic Growers  
Cultivons Biologique Canada  
Perth-Waterloo-Wellington





Created by COG Perth-Waterloo-Wellington, 2010.

COG PWW supports farmers and consumers in building a local organic food system.

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COG PWW encourages everyone to regain control of their food choices, so please share widely but provide credit to COG PWW when you do.

**All the best in creating your  
local organic food strategy!**






# What is a Food Strategy?

A food strategy is **an individualized plan that allows you to realize your vision for the food system**. It encompasses all the means by which you access your food and addresses your concerns related to the type of food you would like to eat and the food system you would like to support. In short, it is the sum of your efforts to eat good food and better the food system.

## Why Do I Need One?

Our current food system is plagued with issues and provides no shortage of motivation for planning a new means of accessing a different kind of food: climate change, genetic modification, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, peak oil, undervalued farmers and food, corporate concentration, pollution, threatened pollinators, health scares, soil erosion... The list goes on, but the point is that we're clearly faced with a crisis in our food system – and it's not about to fix itself.

While you may be familiar with the current and potential damage, perhaps



**“Saying it doesn’t matter what I buy is like saying it doesn’t matter who I vote for. It’s only our purchases that are driving this industrial machine.”**

- Gregory Norris, industrial ecologist, quoted in *Ecological Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman

you are less well-acquainted with how to go about the repairs. The process of creating a food strategy provides you with the empowering opportunity to learn about all the possibilities for change.

## Okay, but why Local AND Organic?

“Local” and “organic” have had the misfortune of entering our mainstream vocabulary as separate concepts and then getting jumbled up into one, unclear concept. To clarify, local and organic are distinct food labels that deal with different aspects of the food chain – distribution and production, respectively. They both have their merits and their limits; one is not morally superior to the other. As soon as we recognize this, we can **embrace the opportunity that local AND organic represent together** – a way to simultaneously address a number of food-related concerns.

Think of your food in terms of a classic five 5Ws exercise and you’ll soon realize your food strategy response requires more than one approach.

*What food do I/we eat?*

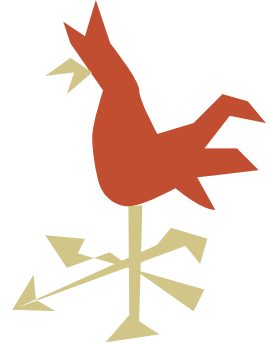
*Where does this food come from?*

*When is it available?*

*Who produces my food?*

*How is my food produced?*

*Why should I care?*



If we are only concerned about one of these questions, then we are missing significant pieces of the whole picture. Addressing any of these questions will have an impact, but buying just local or just organic will result in far less of an impact overall. **A local organic food strategy provides a comprehensive way of addressing each of the five Ws**, plus you (and everyone else, including the environment!) reap all the benefits of both local and organic. Such a strategy grants you with the most power in regaining control of your food choices and in effecting overall food system change.

	LOCAL	ORGANIC
Defined by	A collectively or personally determined geographic space or distance from within which food produced is deemed "local."	The Canada Organic Standard defines organic as "a holistic system designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of...soil organisms, plants, livestock and people." <sup>1</sup>
Five Ws addressed	What, where, when, who and why	What, how and why
How you know	Talk to the farmer/retailer	Canada Organic or other certification body logo (see page 13 for examples)

1. Canada Organic Standard [www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on\\_the\\_net/organic/index-e.html](http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/cgsb/on_the_net/organic/index-e.html)

## Local Organic: Greater in sum than in part

### LOCAL

- Support for local economy and rural communities
- Increased direct marketing opportunities for farmers
  - Reduced greenhouse gas emissions related to transportation
- Strengthened urban-rural ties
- Regained food knowledge and connections

### ORGANIC

- Elimination of artificial inputs
- Certainty of GMO-free food
  - Reduced greenhouse gas emissions related to production
- Decreased water pollution, soil degradation and erosion
  - Improved farm biodiversity and pollinator habitat
- Seed sovereignty for farmers
- Safer working conditions for farmers and farm labourers

### LOCAL + ORGANIC =

Greatest potential for food system change





# The Benefits of Local Organic

Buying local and organic means a lot of benefits for you, your community and the environment.



## *Support for local economy and rural communities*

Buying from area farmers keeps money and jobs in your community while strengthening urban-rural ties. Supporting local organic agriculture also promotes healthier rural communities with the elimination of pesticide exposure.



## *Elimination of artificial inputs*

Instead of focusing on synthetic pesticides, fossil-fuel based fertilizers and antibiotics to grow and manage their crops and livestock, organic farmers mimic natural processes. They rely on beneficial insects, natural cycles, and rotational plantings and grazing to control pests.

To improve soil fertility, organic farmers plant cover crops, including nitrogen-fixing clover and phosphorous-rich buckwheat, which they then work into the soil. The premise is **if you feed the soil, the soil feeds the plants**. The resulting soil supports more life and micronutrients, meaning not only healthier plants, but healthier animals too (including us!).



***Find out about all those pesticides you don't realize you're ingesting at [www.whatsonmyfood.org](http://www.whatsonmyfood.org)***



## Certainty of GMO-free food

Since Canada does not label products that contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs), **certified organic food is your only guarantee that your food is GMO-free from seed to table.** Certified organic farmers are not allowed to plant GM seed or give their animals GM feed.



## Reduced greenhouse gas emissions

Agriculture has a substantial impact on our climate, making up 17-32% of all human-made greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Choosing food that travels less distance to get to you can result in significant greenhouse gas emissions reduction. A study done in the Region of Waterloo found that food in the region travels an average of 4,497 km, emitting 51,709 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions every year. Sourcing these foods locally would mean **an annual 95 per cent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** (49, 485 tonnes) related to food transportation.<sup>3</sup>

Although reducing food miles helps, they are just one part of the greenhouse gas equation. By also thinking about food production practices, the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is even greater. Conventional agriculture's reliance on fossil-fuel based fertilizers results in unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions in their production, distribution

2. J. Bellarby, B. Foereid, A. Hastings and P. Smith. Cool Farming: Climate impacts of agriculture and mitigation potential. Greenpeace International. January 2008. [www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/international/press/reports/cool-farming-full-report.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/international/press/reports/cool-farming-full-report.pdf)

3. Xuereb, M. Food Miles: Environmental Implications of Food Imports to Waterloo Region, 2005.

### Did You Know?

**Up to 70% of processed foods could contain GM ingredients – because the three major GM crops of soy, canola and corn are widely used as ingredients.**

– Canadian Biotechnology Action Network [www.cban.ca](http://www.cban.ca)



## Did You Know?

The production of nitrogen fertilizer requires a temperature of 1000°C and a pressure of 1000 atmospheres – in other words, a lot of fossil fuel energy. Rhizobia bacteria on legume plants (e.g. peas, beans, and clovers used by organic farmers as green manures) use enzymes in the form of carbohydrates from their host plants to do the same job, with very little energy.

- paraphrased from Ralph Martin,  
Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada



and over-application. Instead of increasing emissions by relying on energy-intensive fertilizers, **organic agriculture presents an opportunity to help mitigate climate change** by sequestering carbon in the soil at a much greater rate (20 per cent)<sup>4</sup> than conventional agricultural practices.



## *Decreased water pollution, soil degradation and erosion*

Synthetic fertilizers not only wreak havoc on our climate, but also run off into our water system. These fertilizers are made up of highly soluble nutrients, meaning that their excesses are readily absorbed in and disrupt the natural balances of our ground and surface water. This focus on high nutrient content also means that synthetic fertilizers are not designed to contribute to soil structure or health. In contrast, organic practices of incorporating compost and cover crops into the soil feed soil micro-organisms, which then break down the organic matter to provide a slow, steady release of nutrients. This special attention to building soil health protects our water and results in less erosion.

4. G. Azeez. Soil Carbon and Organic Farming: A review of the evidence on the relationship between agriculture and soil carbon sequestration, and how organic farming can contribute to climate change mitigation and mitigation. UK Soil Association. November 2009.

# Dollars and sense

People often groan at the price of certified organic food, but there are many hidden costs when it comes to cheaper conventional food. There are the tangible, public expenses such as intensive water treatment and health costs associated with pesticide-related diseases and accidents, but there are also the intangible costs of lost pollinators, biodiversity and more – which we eventually pay for through our taxes, our health and our environment's health. And that racks up quite the invisible price tag. Now *that's* something to groan about.



## *Improved farm biodiversity and pollinator habitat*

Organic agriculture strives for a biodiverse farm that mimics nature, as opposed to a monoculture. Factor in the absence of synthetic pesticides and you've got an attractive habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators, which is good for the farm and the ecosystem.



## *Sovereignty for farmers*

Organic farmers are in control of their seed sources and their farm businesses. They do not need to buy seed from multinational corporations or plan their farm businesses according to corporate agendas. As a result, **organic farmers can keep more money and control in their hands**. Buying local increases direct marketing opportunities for farmers, offering them more sovereignty and value for their efforts.



## *Safer working conditions for farmers and farm labourers*

Not using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides means organic farmers and farm labourers have a decreased risk of illnesses related to the use of these products in producing our food, and can thereby enjoy a safer and healthier work environment.



## *Regained food knowledge and connections*

On top of everything, there is the personal gain of feeling better knowing answers to those five-W questions and regaining control of your food choices.

**“ We have lawyers, accountants and doctors;  
we really should all have our own farmer. ”**

– Margaret Webb





# Creating Your Local Organic Food Strategy

Now the fun begins! You know the benefits of adopting a local organic food strategy, now here is how you go about creating one.

First, a few considerations:

## *Everyone's different*

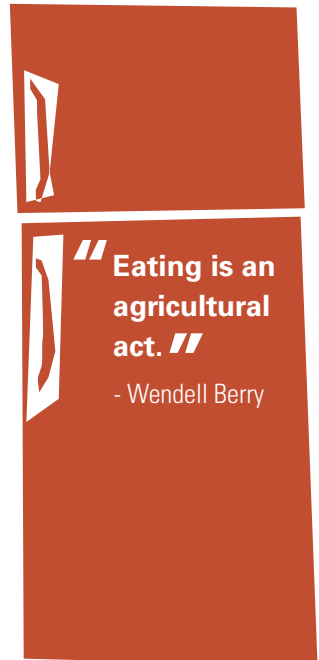
It's important to recognize that food strategies will be different for everyone based on their time, resources, needs and preferences. Be realistic, set goals, and increase them over time.

## *The five Ws (and one H!)*

Keep these questions in mind and get answers for all the foods that you eat.

## *Your favourite food group*

Changing your food strategy entirely can seem daunting, so starting with the foods you eat most makes the process more manageable.

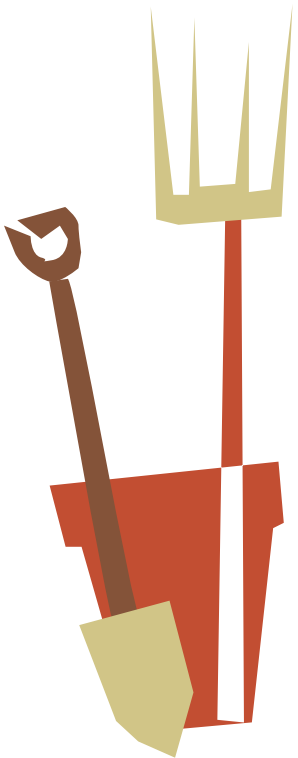


If you eat meat, consider starting there because you will impact both animal welfare and large grain acreage. Otherwise, remember that any change still makes a difference.

➔ **Choosing organic, grass-fed beef can mean up to a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and 85% less energy consumption.<sup>5</sup>**

## *You are not alone*

The fun thing about food is that we all need to eat it, so it requires no effort to bring people together when there is food involved (especially the delectable local organic stuff). Whatever your strategy, share with others and you'll find resources, support, ideas, and probably some good recipes too!



## **Okay, now the fun really begins!**

A local organic food strategy is based on the following principles – **GROW, BUY, PRESERVE, REQUEST** and **LEARN**.

We've provided tips and resources to guide you in fulfilling all these principles as part of your local organic food strategy. Read on to learn about experiencing the seasons fully, connecting with farmers, sharing the process with fellow eaters, and embracing the joy of regaining control of your food choices.

5. G. Koneswaren and D. Nierenberg. Global Farm Animal Production and Global Warming: Impacting and Mitigating Climate Change. Environmental Health Perspectives 116 (5), May 2008.

# Grow Your Own Food

You are the best source of local organic food. Make a list of the main foods your family eats, decide which of those you would like to grow, and learn how to grow them. You can grow a surprising amount in a small space.

- Join an organic community garden if you lack your own gardening space, or are looking for some support and resources in a group setting.
- Take gardening and permaculture courses.
- Talk to your neighbours who have a garden. You can get some pointers from someone who has some experience and maybe even discuss the possibility of bartering produce in the future (I've got lots of zucchinis and you have lots of tomatoes...).

**➔ For a thorough how-to on organic backyard gardening, check out COG PWW's *The Organic Backyard*, available through [www.cogwaterloo.ca](http://www.cogwaterloo.ca)**

## Did You Know?

A small garden measuring 16 ft<sup>2</sup> (or 1.5 m<sup>2</sup>) can produce enough vegetables in a growing season for one person. Expanding the growing area to 64 ft<sup>2</sup> (6 m<sup>2</sup>) can be enough to supply a family of four with fresh food throughout the growing season.

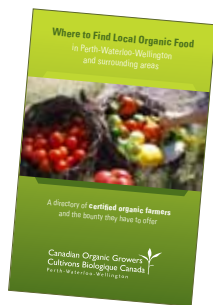
— [www.journeytoforever.org/garden\\_sqft.html](http://www.journeytoforever.org/garden_sqft.html)



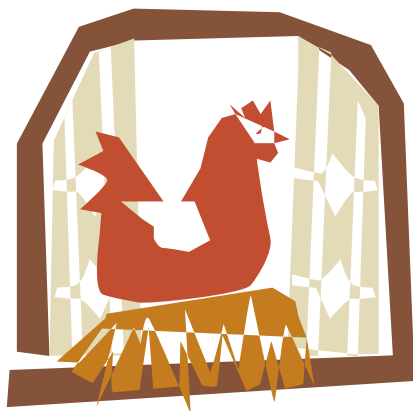
# Buy Certified Organic From Local Farmers

There are many ways in which you can access organic food from local farmers – farmers’ markets, farm gate, CSA/food box programs, buying clubs, or online markets. Consult the chart on page 13 to see which method(s) may work best for you.

➔ **Check out COG PWW’s directory, *Where to Find Local Organic Food, for information on surrounding farms and how you can get their food.***



- CSA stands for Community Supported (or Shared) Agriculture and involves the purchase of a “share” in the farm which then grants you a supply of the harvest throughout the season. Food box programs also provide weekly portions of produce.
- Buying clubs are a form of collective purchasing. They can be as formal or informal as suits you and your neighbours. You could simply join together once or twice a year to split a share of an animal from a local organic beef or pork farmer, or you could be more organized and have a coordinator who makes the trips out to the farms and brings back the goods for everyone on a regular basis.
- Online markets offer you the chance to customize weekly orders through a web-based system and to pick up at a convenient location.



# Food Access Options: Which one's best for you?

	YOU ARE...					
...then this might be right for you	More inclined to one-stop shopping	Available and apt to be out and about Saturday mornings	Looking for a direct relationship with farmers	Wanting to build community around food	Eager to see the countryside	In need of extra-convenient pick-up times and locations
Farmers' Market	✓	✓				
Farm Gate		✓	✓		✓	
CSA/Food Box			✓			✓
Buying Club	✓		✓	✓		✓
Online Market	✓					✓

## Your Legal Guarantee of Organic

Whenever you see “organic” associated with any food, check to see that it bears the Canada Organic logo or that of another certifying body. If you’re buying direct from the farmer, you can ask to see their certification logo or documentation. There are many certification bodies, but they all must meet the Canada Organic Standard, so you can be assured that the food you’re buying was produced in a way that generates all the benefits you’ve come to know are associated with organic agriculture.



# Preserve **What Is In Season**

Take advantage of the bounty of the harvest and buy some (or all) of your favourites in bulk in season to preserve for eating later.

- Attend one of the many canning workshops local organizations make available. See [www.cogwaterloo.ca/events.php](http://www.cogwaterloo.ca/events.php) for upcoming workshops.
- Scavenge used bookstores for a good how-to preserve book.
- Host canning bees. Most churches and community centres will rent their kitchens for an afternoon at a nominal rate so you and your neighbours can preserve to your hearts' content in a large space.
- Can what you can or what you can't buy. You don't need to do everything in the first year – pick the three items your family eats a lot of (tomato sauce, salsa, jam?) and start with those. If a local organic farmer has a product available, you may also want to consider focusing your preserving efforts on another product.

**➔ *The National Center for Home Food Preservation (US) website is chock full of recipes that include quantities of fresh ingredients required so you'll know how much to buy to put by.***





## Request Local Organic Food Where You Shop or Dine

You hold a lot of power as a customer. Any smart manager will listen to what you have to say and deliver on your request because they assume your voice represents many others who have not stepped forward – so tell stores and restaurants what you want and continue to support them if they provide it. Food dollars are your most powerful vote for the food system you would like to have.



## Learn About Fair Trade Organic Food

While we strive to eat local, we cannot deny that we live in a global economy and have climatic restrictions. But we do need to remember that our food choices affect farmers in other parts of the world just as much as they do here. When it comes to imports, instead of local organic, look for fair trade organic products. Fair trade means farmers are being paid a fair wage and work in good conditions to produce that food. Not all products are available as fair trade, but sugar, coffee, tea, bananas, and chocolate are readily available.

Buying these foods fair trade and organic also means protecting the environment from deforestation and pollution, which impacts all of us, even thousands of kilometres away.



“Fair trade” is regulated by a third-party verification system like organic, so ensure you check for either the logo or name of a fair-trade certifying organization, such as the ones pictured here.



# I'm excited! But is it *really* possible?

With all the different ways to access the range of local organic foods available, everyone should be able to find a strategy that works for them and their food preferences and needs. We've done up a couple of sample meals to show just how it can be done. Try the same with some of your favourite meals to start planning where you can find local and organic ingredients.

## *Local organic pizza*

INGREDIENT	SOURCE
tomato sauce	last year's backyard harvest, canned
basil and oregano	neighbour's community garden plot (bartered for other herbs), dried
flour	certified organic farm gate
baking powder, baking soda, salt, oil	certified organic from health food store
cheese	certified organic farmer at farmers' market
pepperoni	certified organic farmer at farmers' market
seasonal vegetable toppings	certified organic CSA

## *Local organic BBQ*

INGREDIENT	SOURCE
ground beef	certified organic farm gate or farm store
eggplant (vegetarian option)	certified organic CSA
ketchup and relish	last year's neighbourhood canning bee
lettuce	your backyard
onion	certified organic CSA
buns	farmers' market (baker uses local organic grain from farm gate)
sweet corn	certified organic farmer at farmers' market
butter	Organic Meadow brand purchased from store

## Go for it!

Now that you have the rationale and information behind you, you can get started with your own local organic food strategizing. Remember to consult [www.cogwaterloo.ca](http://www.cogwaterloo.ca) for further resources and guidance and get in touch with us to share your questions or stories.

*Grow, buy, preserve, request, learn,  
and regain food!*



# Canadian Organic Growers Cultivons Biologique Canada

Perth-Waterloo-Wellington



Supporting farmers and consumers in building a local organic food system

[www.cogwaterloo.ca](http://www.cogwaterloo.ca)



COG PWW gives thanks to the following supporters of our local work:

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