

2024 to 2027

York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy



A MESSAGE FROM YORK REGION CHAIRMAN AND CEO AND MEMBERS OF REGIONAL COUNCIL



Chairman & CEO
Wayne Emmerson

York Regional Council and The Regional Municipality of York remain committed to building communities that foster economic prosperity and create opportunities across all sectors. The York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024 to 2027 underlines this commitment by supporting our vibrant agri-food sector and positioning York Region as a leader for food and beverage manufacturing in Canada.

Building on the first strategy's success, the updated York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy addresses contemporary challenges such as climate change, labour shortages, supply chain disruptions and technological advancements. It also includes practical, actionable and forward-thinking strategies designed to enable the sector to thrive for years to come.

Home to some of the most productive agriculture areas in Canada and the country's fourth-largest food and beverage processing hub, York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector supports more than 67,000 local jobs and is a key contributor to the economic success of the Region. By focusing on strategies supporting innovation, resiliency and education, the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy aims to support the future growth and success of this vibrant industry.

Together, with industry and community partners, local cities and towns and senior levels of government, Regional Council remains focused on building strong, caring, safe and resilient communities that include a robust and productive agriculture and agri-food sector.



Mayor
Frank Scarpitti
City of Markham



Regional Councillor
Michael Chan
City of Markham



Regional Councillor
Jim Jones
City of Markham



Regional Councillor
Joe Li
City of Markham



Regional Councillor
Alan Ho
City of Markham



Mayor
John Taylor
Town of Newmarket



Regional Councillor
Tom Vegh
Town of Newmarket



Mayor
Steven Del Duca
City of Vaughan



Regional Councillor
Linda Jackson
City of Vaughan



Regional Councillor
Mario Ferri
City of Vaughan



Regional Councillor
Gino Rosati
City of Vaughan



Regional Councillor
Mario G. Racco
City of Vaughan



Mayor
Margaret Quirk
Town of Georgina



Regional Councillor
Naomi Davison
Town of Georgina



Mayor
David West
City of Richmond Hill



Regional Councillor
Godwin Chan
City of Richmond Hill



Regional Councillor
Joe DiPaola
City of Richmond Hill



Mayor
Tom Mrakas
Town of Aurora



Mayor
Virginia Hackson
Town of East Gwillimbury



Mayor
Steve Pellegrini
Township of King



Mayor
Iain Lovatt
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that York Region is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat and Métis peoples and the treaty territories of the Haudenosaunee, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Williams Treaties First Nations. Today this area is home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples, and we recognize their history, spirituality, culture and stewardship of this land. We also acknowledge the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation as our closest First Nation community.

Message from York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee

The York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee advises York Regional Council and staff on agriculture, agri-food and rural matters in York Region. Advisory Committee members provide balanced representation across the agri-food value chain including farmers, producers, input suppliers, food processors, distributors and food retailers.

The Advisory Committee is pleased to support York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024-2027. Our Region is enriched by our agriculture and agri-food sector and we are excited for the continued opportunities to support the sector and implement the strategy.

We thank York Regional Council and members of the 2023-2026 term of the Advisory Committee for their guidance and support. Collaboration and partnerships are key to the success and implementation of this strategy. We look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen relationships across our communities so that York Region is a place that all are proud to call home.

Sincerely,



Councillor Avia Eek
Township of King
Chair, Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee 2023 to 2026




Kim Empringham
York Region Federation of Agriculture
Vice Chair, Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee 2023 to 2026



Acknowledgements

This strategy was developed with contributions from the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee, stakeholders, community partners, industry experts, local economic development, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness and regional staff.

We extend a special acknowledgment to Wilton Consulting Group for their collaboration with York Region staff in facilitating group consultations, research, analysis and development of this strategy. Additionally, we recognize Stoddart Regenerative Strategy for conducting the economic impact analysis.

We gratefully acknowledge their expertise and efforts to develop this strategy.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee

- York Region Chairman and CEO Wayne Emmerson
- Regional Councillor Naomi Davison, Town of Georgina
- Councillor Avia Eek, Township of King (Chair)
- Kim Empringham, York Federation of Agriculture (Vice Chair)
- Janice Bartley
- Antonio Gomes
- Brandon Hebor
- Laurie Jittoo
- Scott Paisley
- Melanie Pearson
- Jenna Pegg
- Jessica Tong



Executive Summary

Overview

York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector is a significant contributor to the local economy, accounting for \$3.8 billion in gross domestic product.

Home to some of the most productive agricultural areas in Canada, the total operating farm revenue per acre ranks first in the Greater Toronto Area, and third highest in the Golden Horseshoe. The total economic impact of primary production in York Region is \$711 million. Additionally, York Region is also home to the fourth-largest food and beverage manufacturing sector in Canada. Our uniquely integrated agri-food value-chain gives York Region an economic advantage.

Since the launch of York Region's first Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy (2017-2022), the industry has evolved, adapting to new trends and challenges, including climate change, labour shortages, supply chain disruptions and technological advancements. Building on the successes of the first iteration, this updated strategy steers York Region's agriculture and agri-food initiatives for the next four years.

Guided by York Region's 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results, Economic Development Action Plan 2024-2027 and Climate Change Action Plan, the new Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy (2024-2027) is a road map that guides the development of program initiatives and enables the sector to thrive for years to come.

This document provides an overview of the strategy development process, an economic snapshot of the sector, findings from stakeholder engagements, and outlines the pillars, goals and action items for 2024-2027.

The strategy was developed using a phased approach with input from over 200 stakeholders through background research, data analysis, consultations, focus groups, interviews, agri-food business survey and engagement with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee. The strategy identifies three overarching pillars with goals and 27 actions to be completed by the end of 2027. Continued communication and collaboration with agri-food stakeholders will be key to the successful implementation of this plan.

York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024-2027



Figure 1 | Overview of 2024-2027 Strategy pillars and goals.





Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement	ii
Message from York Region Chairman and CEO and Members of Regional Council	iii
Message from York Region’s Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Executive Summary	vi
Overview	vi
York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024-2027 ...	vii

1.0 The Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector – National to Local Context	1
2.0 Key Accomplishments from the 2017-2022 Agriculture & Agri-Food Sector Strategy	8
3.0 Strategy Development Process	9
3.1 Background Research	10
3.2 Strategy Development through Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Indigenous Reconciliation Lens	12
3.3 Stakeholder Engagement	13
3.4 Strategy Development	14
4.0 Understanding Key Trends in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector	15
4.1 Agriculture in York Region	15
4.2 The Agri-Food Value Chain	27
5.0 What We Heard: Stakeholder Consultation Findings	31
5.1 Focus Groups	32
5.2 Interviews	33
5.3 Agri-Food Business Survey	35
6.0 York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024-2027	42
Pillar 1: Business, Entrepreneurship and Innovation	43
Pillar 2: Resilient and Diverse Local Agri-Food Value Chain	47
Pillar 3: Outreach, Education and Communication	51
Appendices	55
Appendix A: Key Accomplishments from the 2017-2022 Agriculture & Agri-Food Sector Strategy	55
Appendix B: Total Economic Impact of York Region’s Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector	59
Appendix C: Insights into York Region’s Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Competitiveness	63
Appendix D: NAICS Codes Represented	67
Appendix E: Agri-Food Business Survey Results	68
Appendix F: Glossary of Terms	73

1.0 The Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector – National to Local Context



The agriculture and agri-food sector is an economic driver, accounting for about 7% of Canada’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022.¹ The sector holds significant promise for growth. Export Development Canada estimates that the national “agriculture and agri-food sector could make up as much as 27% of Canada’s trade gap.”²

At the provincial level, the agriculture and agri-food industry contributes \$48.8 billion in GDP, or 6.4% of the province’s total GDP. The government of Ontario aims to increase both the production and consumption of food grown and prepared in the province by 30% by 2032.³

The importance of the agriculture and agri-food sector is reflected in both federal and provincial investments in agriculture and agri-food innovation. These investments include programs such as Agri-Tech Innovation Program, the [Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership \(Sustainable CAP\)](#), and the [Agricultural Climate Solutions](#) program.

The agriculture and agri-food sector includes:

- Agricultural input suppliers (e.g., fertilizers, crop protection products, seed, feed mills, supplements for livestock and poultry, agri-tech, machinery companies and service providers)
- Agricultural advisors and support services (e.g., veterinarians, livestock/poultry nutritionists, Certified Crop Advisors, professional agrologists)
- Primary agriculture (i.e., farmers/producers)
- Food and beverage processors
- Food retailers (e.g., grocery store, bakery, butcher)
- Food and beverage distribution, wholesale, and/or storage (e.g., transport, cold storage)
- Food service providers (e.g., restaurants, catering businesses)

¹ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. (July 2023). Overview of Canada’s agriculture and agri-food sector.
² Redding, Susan. (July 2023). [Export tips and trends for Canada’s agriculture and food industry](#). Export Development Canada.
³ Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. (Nov. 2022). [Grow Ontario: a provincial agri-food strategy](#).



Our Region is unique in its mix of urban and rural communities.

Rural communities are an integral part of York Region’s economy. Contributing to primary production, manufacturing, tourism, agri-tech and more, York Region’s rural communities are a key driver of the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Rural communities in York Region present vast economic development opportunities with a focus on fostering sustainable growth.

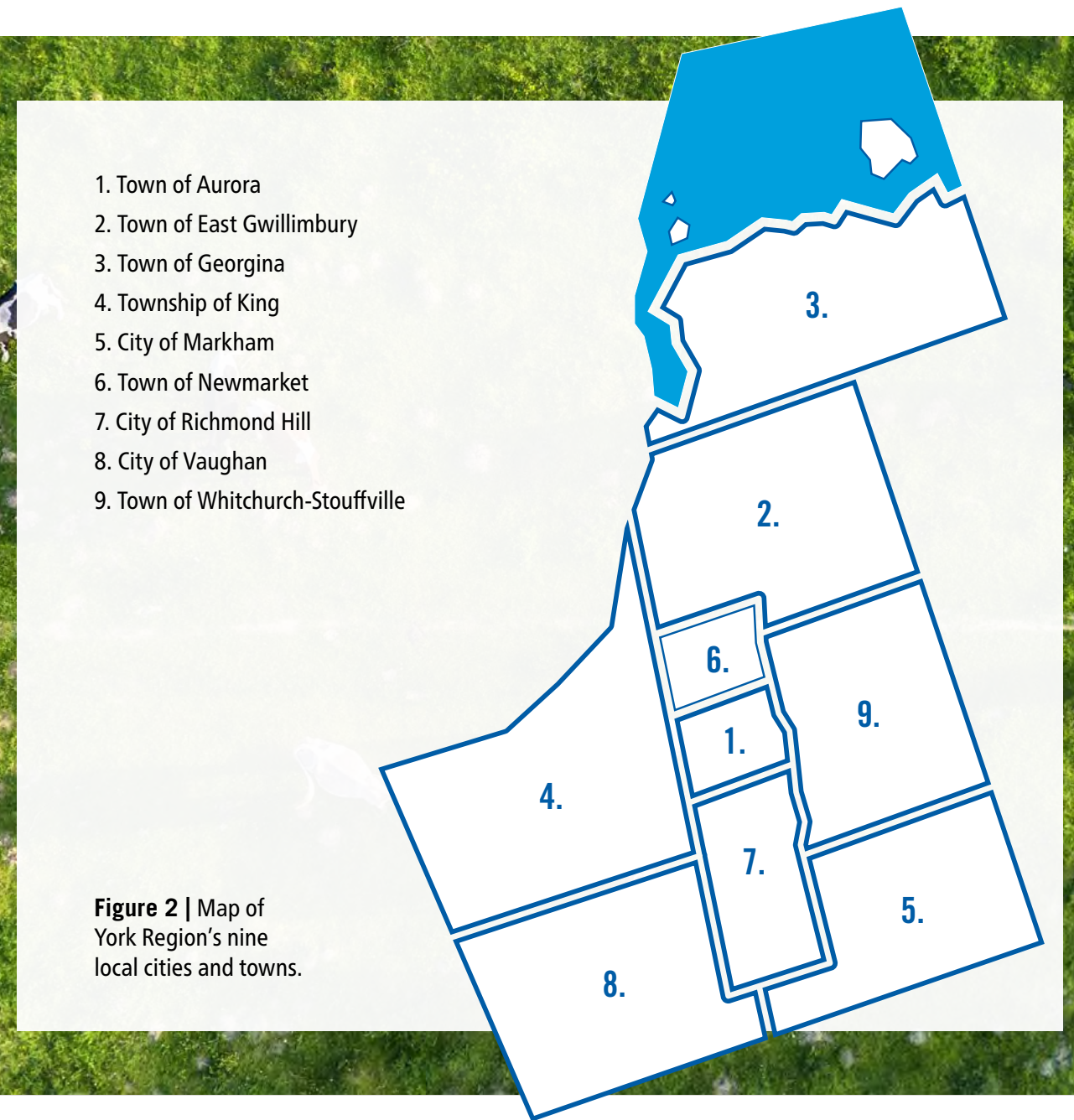


Figure 2 | Map of York Region’s nine local cities and towns.

York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector is a significant contributor to the local economy and provides safe and nutritious food that is consumed locally, across Canada and abroad. From the rich soils of the Holland Marsh to a diverse mix of food and beverage businesses, the sector contributes \$3.8 billion to York Region's economy.⁴

Home to some of the most productive agricultural areas in Canada, with almost half of its land protected for agricultural uses, York Region farms generate over \$390 million in operating revenues. The total operating farm revenue of \$2,903 per acre ranks first in the Greater Toronto Area and third highest in the Golden Horseshoe, indicating high productivity levels in agriculture. This may be partially attributed to more than half of the Holland Marsh (a speciality crop area) being in the Region.

The Marsh is also home to the University of Guelph's Muck Crops Research Station.

York Region is one of Canada's largest food and beverage processing sectors. The agri-food sector includes nearly 5,000 businesses, with more than 600 farms and over 300 food and beverage manufacturers and distributors contributing to York Region's economic vitality. The agriculture and agri-food sector in York Region, including farms, processors, food retailers and restaurants, provides approximately 67,000 jobs. Our uniquely integrated agri-food value-chain gives York Region an economic advantage.

Figure 3 highlights York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector as a significant contributor to the local economy.



Figure 3 | York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector as a significant contributor to the local economy.

⁴ For more information about the economic impact of York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector, please see [Appendix B](#).

Spotlight on primary production⁵:

- More than 20% of agri-food industry sales in the Golden Horseshoe are attributed to York Region businesses
- \$711 Million – the total economic impact of primary production in York Region
- \$240 Million – the contribution from York Region's primary production sector (farms) to Regional Gross Domestic Product
- 3,100 jobs created by primary production in York Region
- This equates to \$132 million in wages and salaries

The strategy references the term **agri-food businesses** which encompasses farms, food processors, food distributors and logistics companies, support service companies, retailers, restaurants and food services.

AGRI-FOOD VALUE CHAIN

Agri-food value chains focus specifically on the economic aspects of food production and distribution. Figure 4 illustrates the agri-food value chain, outlining key components with sequence of activities and processes involved in bringing agricultural products from farm to fork. Agri-food value chains emphasize the creation and distribution of economic value along the various stages of production, processing, distribution and marketing.



Figure 4 | Diagram of the agri-food value chain.

⁵ For more information about the economic impact of York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector, please see [Appendix B](#).



In addition, **agriculture-related uses** and on-farm diversified uses play a crucial role in enhancing the sustainability and economic viability of the agriculture and agri-food sector in Ontario. Agriculture-related uses include activities directly related to farming operations, such as farm equipment repair shops and agricultural processing facilities. These uses not only support farm operations but also strengthen the local agricultural economy by creating jobs and fostering rural development.

On-farm diversified uses, on the other hand, allow farmers to diversify their income streams and improve farm profitability through activities such as agri-tourism, farm-based retail, and value-added processing. For instance, a farm might host seasonal events like pumpkin patches or corn mazes, operate a farm store selling locally produced goods, or establish a small-scale winery or brewery.

Adhering to provincial guidelines, these uses ensure that agricultural lands are utilized effectively, promoting innovation and resilience within the sector while maintaining the agricultural character of rural communities.

The agriculture sector also includes non-food-related agricultural uses and businesses such as fiber production, biofuel development, floriculture and the manufacturing of sustainable materials.

Planning Context

The planning policy landscape in Ontario has evolved since the development and delivery of the first Agriculture and Agri-Food sector Strategy in York Region. These changes include the removal of statutory powers under the [Planning Act](#) for York Region via the [More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022](#).

For York Region, these changes came into effect on July 1, 2024. *Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act (2024)* states that, “once in effect, planning policy and

approval responsibilities of the regional municipality will be removed and the lower-tier municipalities will assume primary responsibility for all planning in their geographies, except for matters requiring provincial approval”.⁶

In York Region, the majority of agricultural lands are located within the countryside area of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Greenbelt Plan.

⁶ Government of Ontario. April 24, 2024. [Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes](#).





2.0 Key Accomplishments from the 2017-2022 Agriculture & Agri-Food Sector Strategy

York Regional Council approved the first Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy in October 2017, to guide long-term growth of the sector and set direction for the development of program initiatives. In addition, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee was established by Regional Council in 2018 to provide advice to Council and staff on agriculture, agri-food and rural matters in York Region. As a result, the Region has implemented initiatives to support the agri-food sector, promote agri-tourism and enhance the overall economic resilience of rural areas.

York Region worked closely with local municipal partners, the Advisory Committee, and agri-food stakeholders to implement actions in the 2017 – 2022 York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy. Implementation of the first strategy occurred from 2018 to 2023. Several key outcomes achieved in the first strategy have been outlined in Figure 5 below. Additional achievements can be found in [Appendix A](#).



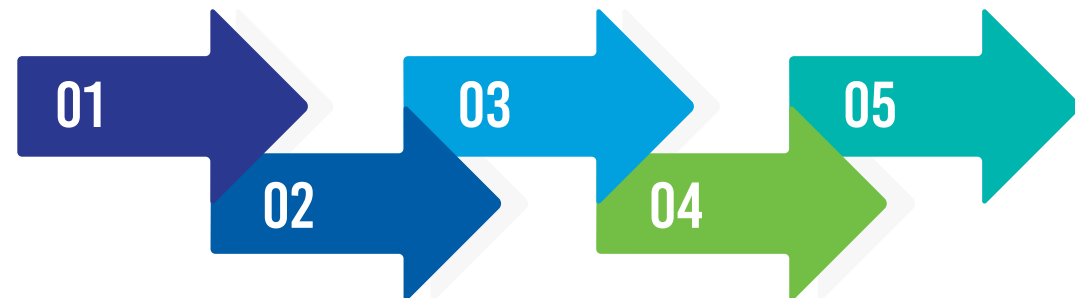
Figure 5 | 2017-2022 Agriculture and Agri-Food Programming Outcomes.

3.0 Strategy Development Process

The strategy was developed taking a phased approach, which included background research, data analysis, consultations with community partners, developing focus areas, drafting the strategy, and refining the final strategy with input from key stakeholders.

This process included engagement (focus groups, survey and interviews) with over 200 stakeholders across the agri-food sector, including:

- York Region’s Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee
- Agri-food business leaders (farmers/producers, food and beverage processors, retailers etc.)
- Industry associations, Chambers/Boards of Trade
- Members of equity-deserving and Indigenous communities
- Not-for-profit organizations and innovation partners
- Researchers and academic institutions
- Government representatives including provincial and local municipal partners



1. Kick-off

October 2023

- Initiation of strategy development process

2. Background research and data analysis

November 2023 - January 2024

- Review of sector priorities from global to local level
- Review key York Region strategic documents
- Sector data, macro and micro economic insights

3. Stakeholder consultations and analysis

January - March 2024

- Five focus groups
- Agri-food value business survey
- 21 interviews
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee engagement

4. Draft Strategy with Pillars Goals and Actions

April - September 2024

- Facilitated discussion with economic strategy team on key findings
- Presentations to local municipal economic development staff, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee for input and feedback
- Three working group meetings to refine strategy content

5. Final strategy

October 2024

- York Region Council review and approval of 2024-2027 Strategy

Figure 6 | Overview of strategy development process.

3.1 Background Research

To ensure the strategy aligns with broader trends and regulations while effectively addressing regional and local needs, agriculture and agri-food sector priorities were reviewed from global to local levels (Table 1).

POLICY LEVEL	EXAMPLES OF POLICY PRIORITIES EXPLORED	SNAPSHOT OF KEY FOCUS AREAS RELATED TO YORK REGION'S AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD SECTOR
Global	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference of the Parties 28 UAE Declaration (COP28) on sustainable agriculture, resilient food systems and climate action • United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting climate adaptation • Building resilient food systems
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership • Canada’s Food Policy • Canada’s Sustainable Agriculture Strategy (Draft) • Canada’s Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act • A healthy environment and a healthy economy • Canada’s Rural Economic Development Strategy • Circular economy funding programs • Programming under Canada’s Strategic Innovation Fund (i.e., Canada’s Food Innovation Network programming) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices • Enabling emissions reduction in the agriculture and agri-food sector and enhancing circularity in the food system • Driving rural economic development
Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth Plan for the Greater Horseshoe • More homes built faster • Made in Ontario environment plan • Grow Ontario: A provincial agri-food strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolster the agriculture and agri-food sector workforce • Grow local food production, consumption and education
Regional and Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan • Regional Tourism Organization 6 (RTO6) strategic priorities • Greenbelt Foundation strategic priority areas • Greenbelt strategic priority areas • York Region strategic priorities • Local municipal economic development priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food sector entrepreneurship and business development • Grow opportunities for agritourism and on-farm value added activities

Table 1 | Overview of policies reviewed as part of the background research.

There are also several key York Region strategic documents that informed the development of this strategy. This strategy aligns with existing goals and efforts, providing an agriculture and agri-food sector lens to enable the Region to achieve several related priorities:

- Economic Development Action Plan, 2024-2027
- Integrated Waste Management Master Plan
- Climate Change Action Plan
- Community Safety and Well-being Plan
- Official Plan
- Circular Economy Roadmap
- York Region Food Charter
- 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results

The strategy draws on agriculture and agri-food sector data, including macro and micro economic insights. The following data informs section 4.0 of this Strategy:

- 2016 & 2021 Census of Agriculture (Statistics Canada)
- 2016 & 2023 Business counts and employment data (Statistics Canada’s Canadian Business Counts, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness)
- York Region Employment Survey
- Shift-share analysis and local economic insights (Lightcast Analyst)



2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results



Climate Change Action Plan

3.2 Strategy Development Through an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Indigenous Reconciliation Lens

As of 2021, York Region is one of the most diverse areas in Canada with a population of over 1.2 million, speaking over 120 languages, and representing over 230 distinct ethnic origins.

York Region’s commitment and work related to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) is rooted in the [Inclusion Charter for York Region](#) endorsed by Regional Council in June 2018. Providing policy direction for the Region, the Charter is also endorsed by more than 35 organizations in York Region including businesses, community organizations, municipalities, police services, hospitals, school boards, conservation authorities and agencies with a common commitment to create an inclusive environment with equality for all who work, live, and play here.

The 2024 – 2027 York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy is focused on economic prosperity for our communities and guided by an IDEA and Indigenous Reconciliation lens with key performance metrics reflecting

the tangible progress achieved in implementing these practices. Within this framework, economic development plays an integral role in promoting the growth of agri-food businesses owned by equity-deserving groups, facilitating the integration of newcomers, youth, women and Indigenous people into the labour force.

York Region celebrates our growing and diverse population as a source of strength, vitality, and economic opportunity.

Alongside the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, on whose traditional territory we reside, York Region continues to learn more, do more and be allies for change. Exploring agriculture and agri-food projects with Indigenous communities that are aligned with their aspirations while embracing Indigenous ecological wisdom and philosophies is an important component of this strategy as we work together along the path of reconciliation.

3.3 Stakeholder Engagement

Internal and external stakeholder engagement was crucial for gathering key insights about the agriculture and agri-food sector in York Region. A mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches to stakeholder engagement were used. Stakeholder engagement included:

- Focus groups
- One-on-one interviews
- An agri-food business survey
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee Engagement

Focus groups

Five focus groups were held in January to gather diverse perspectives and insights on the sector and help inform the new strategy. These sessions were attended by 118 various stakeholders including York Region staff, local government representatives, agri-food businesses, industry experts and community partners. Members of indigenous communities and equity-deserving groups⁷ were engaged in focus groups and interviews.

Interviews

In addition, 21 interviews were completed with key stakeholders to capture a broad range of perspectives.

Agri-food business survey

To further understand the dynamics and needs of the agriculture and agri-food sector, a business survey was promoted across the agriculture and agri-food sector between January 9 and March 1, 2024. In total, 61 respondents completed the survey. For more information about the survey results, please see Appendix E.

Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee engagement

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee provides advice on agriculture, agri-food and rural matters in York Region. As key stakeholders tasked with supporting the Region with the implementation of actions from the strategy, the Committee was engaged over the course of the strategy development process. All committee members were invited to participate in the focus group sessions as well as one-on-one interviews. A working group with select members of the Advisory Committee was also established to review and refine the strategy.



3.4 Strategy Development

Once drafted, this strategy was reviewed and developed with input from several key stakeholders that were part of a working group:

- York Region staff
- Select members from the Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee to provide in-depth review and insights
- Local economic development staff across York Region's nine local cities and towns
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) staff

The input received was integral to the finalization of this strategy. The strategy is the result of strong support and input from agri-food stakeholders across York Region.

⁷ Equity deserving groups are communities that experience significant collective barriers in participating in society. This could include attitudinal, historic, social and environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status, etc. Equity-deserving groups are those that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination and actively seek social justice and reparation. [Appendix F: Glossary](#)

4.0 Understanding Key Trends in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector

This section consolidates insights gained from background research and data analysis, drawing on findings from the Census of Agriculture, business counts employment data and the York Region Employment Survey.

4.1 Agriculture in York Region

A Region rich in fertile agricultural land

Nearly one-third (30.6%) of York Region’s total land area is farmland.⁸ The majority of York Region’s total farm area is in the north; which includes King Township (24% of York Region’s total farm area) and the Towns of Whitchurch-Stouffville (23%), East Gwillimbury (17%) and Georgina (16%).

MUNICIPALITY ⁹	2016 – NUMBER OF FARMS	2021 - NUMBER OF FARMS	2016 – TOTAL FARM AREA (ACRES)	2021 - TOTAL FARM AREA (ACRES)
Vaughan	56	52	7,584	7,862
Markham	53	44	24,782	12,940
Whitchurch-Stouffville	116	83	17,127	30,682
Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill ¹⁰	21	35	4,067	5,991
King	242	182	40,250	32,669
East Gwillimbury	121	106	24,670	23,050
Georgina	103	102	24,096	21,220
Total – York Region	712	604	142,576	131,414

Table 2 | Number of farms by member municipalities for 2016 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

The Region’s soils and climate are well-suited to produce a diversity of commodities, including sod, field vegetables, grains and oilseeds, forage and grass seed, nursery, potatoes and floriculture.¹¹

⁸ Refers to [land owned or operated by an agricultural operation](#). It can include idle land and land that has farm buildings on it.
⁹ The number of farms within each municipality is measured, in part, by the location of the registered address of the farm business. Statistics Canada defines farm as a unit that produces agricultural products and reports revenues or expenses for tax purposes to the Canada Revenue Agency.
¹⁰ For the 2021 Census of Agriculture, the Towns of Aurora, Newmarket and Richmond Hill are reported as one consolidated Census Subdivision.
¹¹ Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. (May 2023). [Ontario farm cash receipts by county and commodity](#), adapted from Statistics Canada.



HOLLAND MARSH

York Region is home to part of the Holland Marsh, which is a specialty crop area with muck soils that are protected under the Greenbelt Plan. The Holland Marsh is located on the border of the Township of King (York Region) and the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury (Simcoe County) and consists of “some of the richest farmland in Ontario.” The Marsh is well suited to produce crops such as beets, carrots, onions (yellow cooking, red and white), parsnips, celery, lettuce, radishes, cabbage, broccoli, a variety of Asian vegetables and a variety of other greens.

Diverse agricultural commodities are produced

Farmers in York Region produce a range of commodities (Figure 7). The most common type of farms in the Region produce oilseeds and grains (20%) followed by vegetables and melons (14%). Other animal production¹² is the most common (17%) type of livestock farm, followed by beef and cattle ranching and farming (13%).

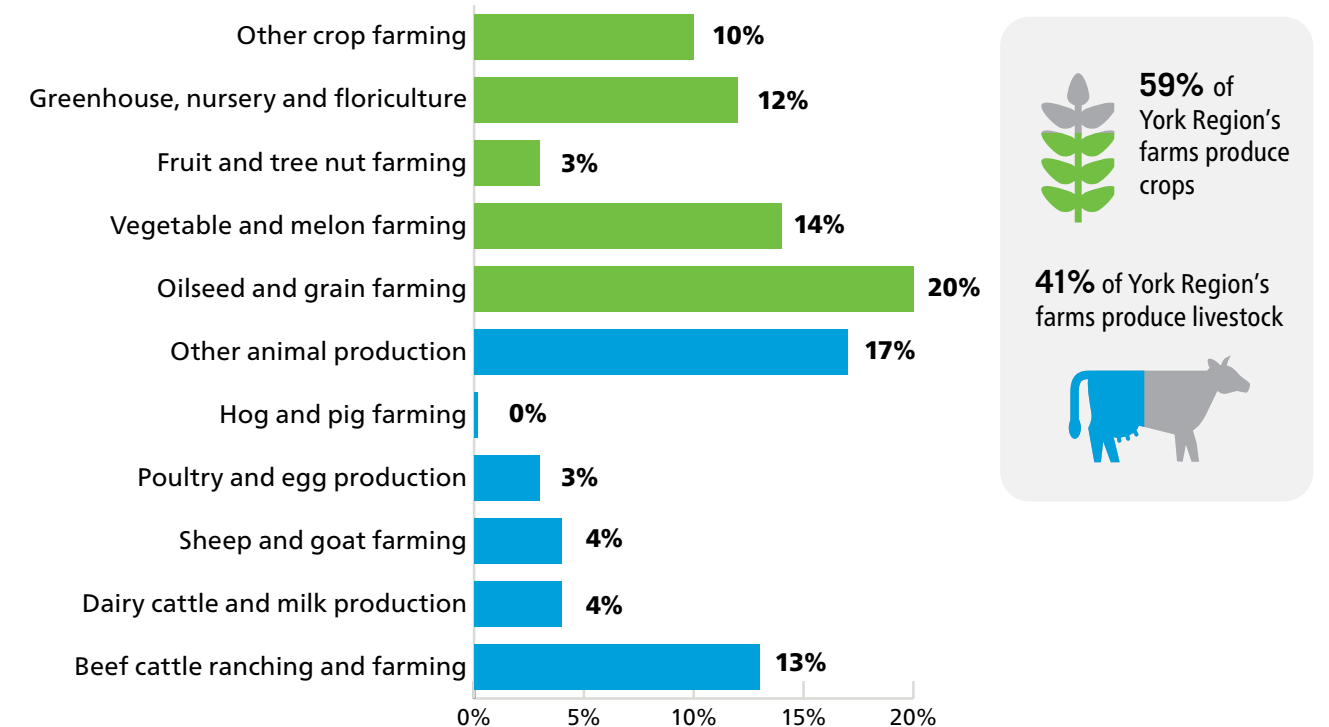


Figure 7 | Percentage of farms in York Region by production type, 2021 (note some farms produce both crops and livestock). Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

¹² “Other animal production” includes horse and other equine production, apiculture, animal combination farming, and rabbit production.

York Region produces 8% of the province’s vegetable crops and 63% of the Golden Horseshoe area’s vegetable crops. The Region continues to see an increase in the acreage of specialty crops such as carrots, Chinese cabbage, dry, yellow and cooking onions and sweet corn (Figure 8).¹³

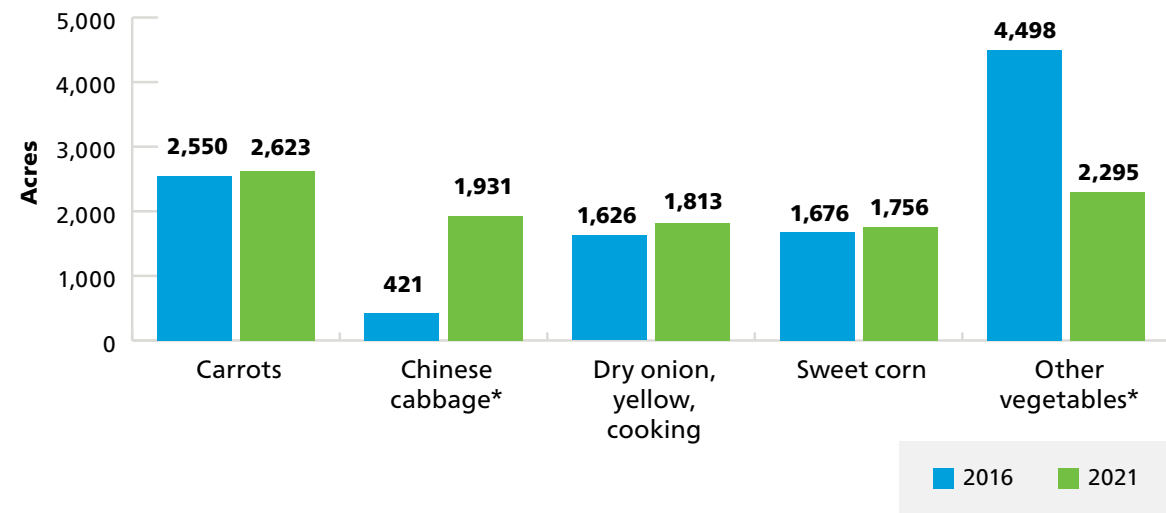


Figure 8 | York Region production of vegetable crops between 2016 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Farms and farmland in York Region

In 2021, there were 604 farms in York Region. Between 2016 and 2021, the Region saw 108 fewer farms (a 15% decrease) (Figure 9). The total acreage of farmland in York Region has also declined over the same time, by just over 8,000 acres (6%) between 2016 and 2021.

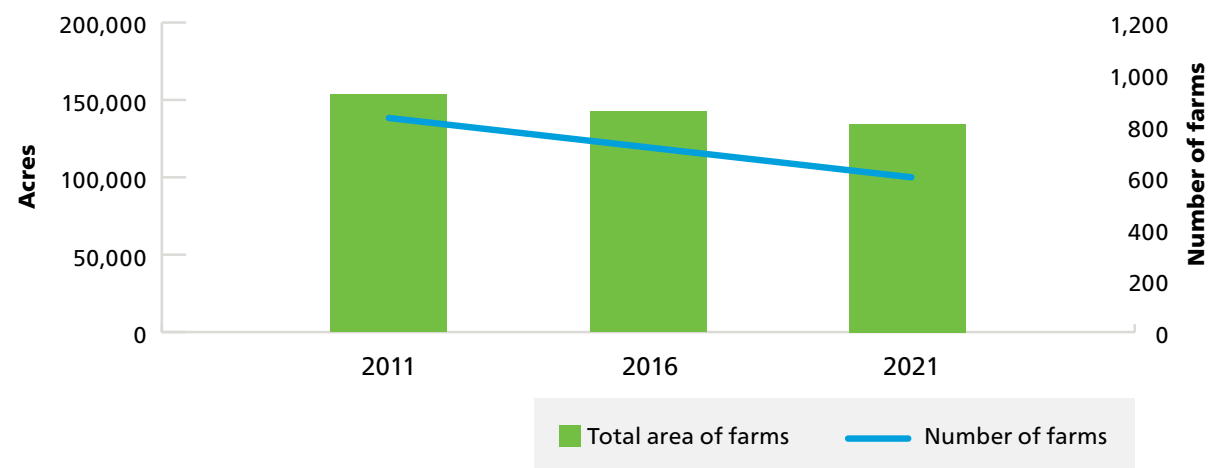


Figure 9 | Number of farms and total farm area in York Region for 2011 to 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

¹³ Note that in 2021, Chinese cabbage included bok choy and napa instead of being reported as “other field vegetables”.

Many regions across the Greater Golden Horseshoe area are also experiencing a similar decline in total farm area. For example, Hamilton saw an 8% decline and Durham Region saw a 10% decline between 2016 and 2021 (Table 3).

GEOGRAPHY	ACRES (2016)	ACRES (2021)	% CHANGE
Ontario	12,348,463	11,766,071	-5%
Peel	83,339	95,583	15%
Dufferin	156,593	157,389	1%
Hamilton	128,532	118,070	-8%
Halton	68,676	72,920	6%
Durham	292,815	264,518	-10%
York	142,585	134,414	-6%

Table 3 | Total farm area (acres) in Ontario, York Region and surrounding regions for 2016 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.





More than half (56%) of York Region's farm businesses are 10-129 acres in size.

YORK REGION FARMLAND
 Key Facts – Between 2016 and 2021:

- The amount of farmland in York Region declined by 6%
- There are 15% (108) fewer farms in York Region
- The average farm size increased by 11%

The average farm size in York Region is increasing

The average farm size in York Region is 223 acres. The Region's average farm size is slightly lower than the average farm size in Ontario (243 acres). Most (56%) of York Region's farm businesses are 10-129 acres.

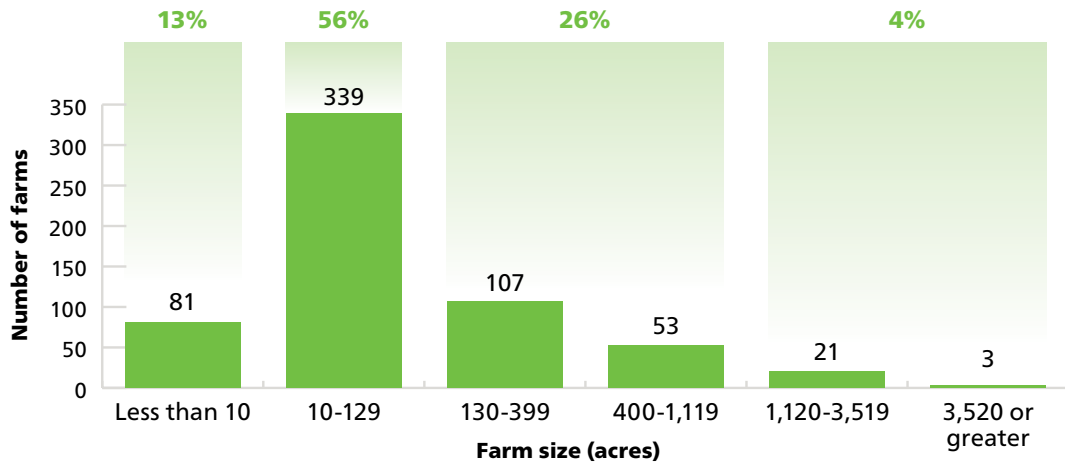


Figure 10 | Farms reporting total farm area for 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Between 2016 and 2021, the percentage of farms 10-129 acres in size decreased from 59% to 56% (Table 4).

Farm size (acres)	PERCENTAGE OF FARMS BASED ON THEIR REPORTED FARM AREA		
	2016	2021	Change
Less than 10	12%	13%	↑
10-129	59%	56%	↓
130-399	18%	18%	—
400-1,119	8%	9%	↑
1,120-3,519	3%	3%	—
3,520 or greater	0.4%	0.5%	↑

Table 4 | Percentage of farms based on their reported farm size (acres) for 2016 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Total area of rented farmland is stable

From 2016-2021, the total area of farmland rented and leased in York Region has remained relatively stable, increasing by 1%.

	2016	2021	% CHANGE
Total area of owned farmland:	67,293 acres	62,556 acres	-7%
Total area of rented farmland:	67,835 acres	68,314 acres	1%
Total area of land leased from the government:	6,209 acres	6,273 acres	1%

Table 5 | York Region Overall Farm Data. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Between 2016 and 2021, the total area of farmland rented and leased increased in Whitchurch-Stouffville, Vaughan, Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill and East Gwillimbury. Over the same time, the total area of farmland owned also increased in Whitchurch-Stouffville and Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill (Table 6).

	Acreage of farm area owned (2016)	Acreage of farm area owned (2021)	Acreage of farm area rented ¹⁴ (2016)	Acreage of farm area rented (2021)
ONTARIO	8,746,547	8,413,093	4,002,868	3,773,802
York Region	67,293	62,556	75,094	75,733
Vaughan	4,331	3,923	2,927	4,476
Markham	6,582	4,308	10,563	8,483
Whitchurch-Stouffville	8,886	10,323	9,118	21,175
Newmarket/Aurora/Richmond Hill	1,405	3,118	2,645	3,445
King	17,954	15,505	22,885	17,692
East Gwillimbury	13,998	12,565	11,036	11,238
Georgina	14,137	12,814	10,460	9,224

Table 6 | Acreage of farmland owned and rented in Ontario, York and nine cities and towns for 2016 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

¹⁴ Rented area includes area leased from the government and crop-shared area.

An opportunity for on-farm transition/succession planning

There are 875 farm operators in York Region. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of farm operators in York Region declined by 15%.

The average age of farmers in York Region is 60. Between 2016 and 2021, farm operators under the age of 35 and farm operators between 35 and 54 declined by 38% and 31%, respectively (Figure 11).

30% of York Region's farm operators are female.

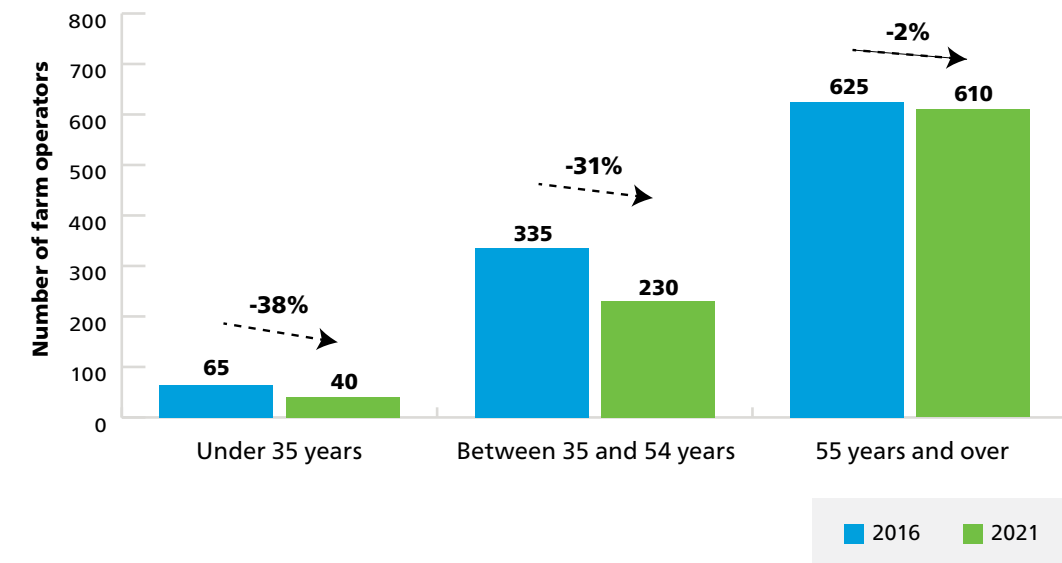


Figure 11 | Number of farm operators for 2016 and 2021 in York Region based on age groups¹⁵. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Operations that have written succession plans increased by 38% between 2016 to 2021. A total of 80 farm operations have written business succession plans and 139 have discussed a plan (Figure 12).

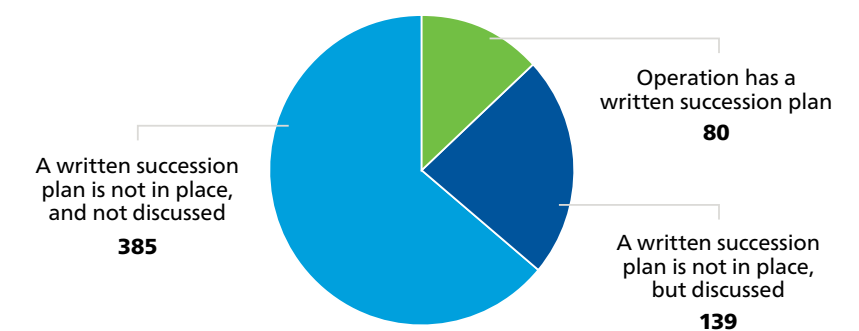


Figure 12 | Status of written succession plans for York Region farm operations in 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

¹⁵ This figure represents farms with one operator and multiple farm operators.

York Region's farms continue to innovate to enhance productivity and increase revenues

In 2021, York Region farmers reported more than \$390 million in total gross operating revenue, a 29% increase from 2016. The Region saw an even larger increase (37%) in average gross operating revenue per acre, highlighting that farmers are increasing productivity per acre (Figure 13). The Region has the third-highest average gross operating revenue per acre in the Golden Horseshoe at \$2,903/acre (\$1,200/acre higher than the Ontario average).

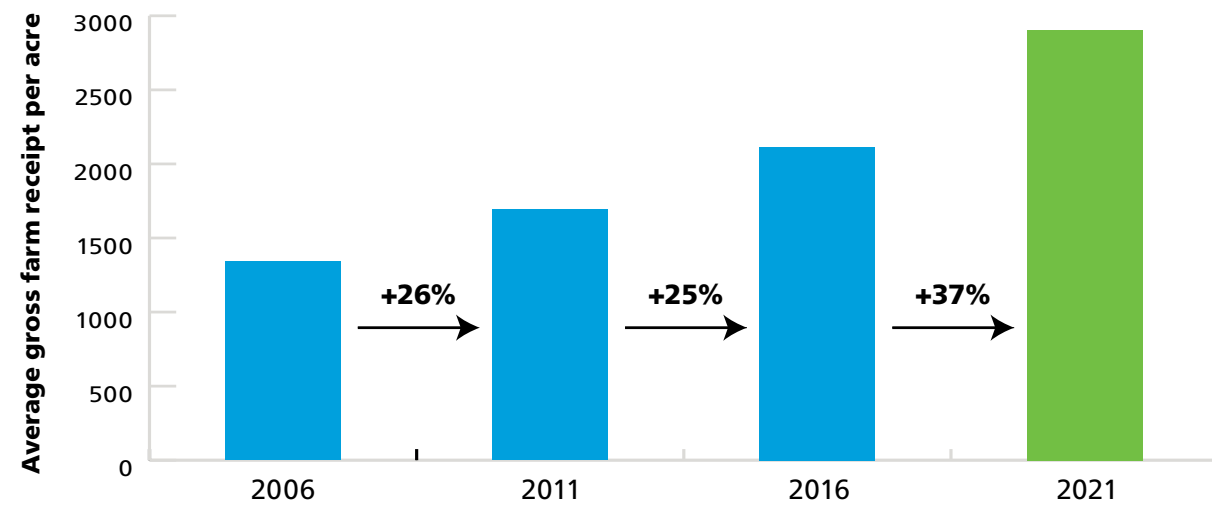


Figure 13 | Average gross farm operating revenue per acre in York Region from 2006 to 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

In 2021, 19% of farms in York Region reported more than \$500,000 in gross farm receipts¹⁶, up 4% from 2016. On the other hand, 59% of York Region farms reported less than \$100,000 in gross farm receipts in 2021, compared to 62% in 2016.

GROSS FARM RECEIPTS	% OF YORK REGION FARMS		
	2011	2016	2021
Less than \$100,000	62%	62%	59%
\$100,000 to \$500,000	25%	23%	22%
More than \$500,000	13%	15%	19%

Table 7 | Percentage of farms in each gross farm receipt bracket in York Region between 2011 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

¹⁶ The gross farm receipts are the total value of cash from selling agricultural products.

The proportion of farmers selling their product directly to consumers has increased from 20% to 22% between 2016 and 2021 (Table 8). York Region has a higher percentage of farms selling agricultural products directly to consumers compared to the Ontario average of 16%.

SALES CHANNEL	% OF FARMS (2016)	% OF FARMS (2021)
Agricultural products directly sold to consumers for human consumption	20%	22%
Farm gate sales, stands, kiosks, and/or u-pick	17%	16%
Farmers markets	3%	3%
Community Supported Agriculture	1%	1%

Table 8 | A breakdown of agricultural products sold directly to consumers in York Region between 2016 and 2021. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.



York Region farmers are innovative and use sustainable best management practices

Around one fifth of York Region farms use environmental best management practices including co-till/zero-till seeding, rotational grazing and winter cover crops (Figure 14). Between 2016 and 2021, the percentage of farms using innovative technologies such as automated steering and GIS mapping has nearly doubled.

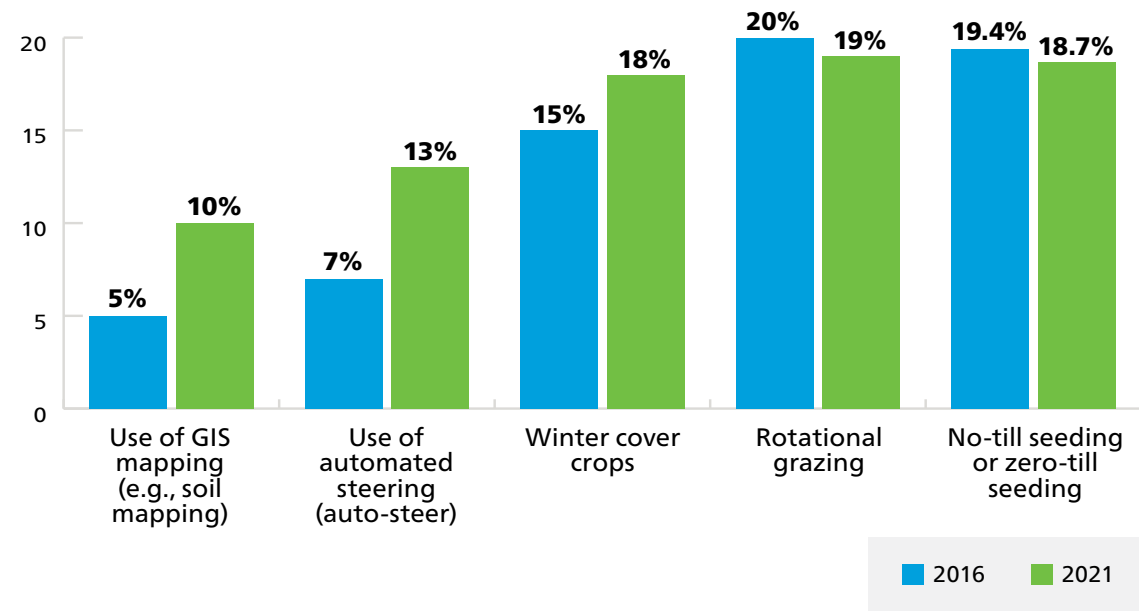


Figure 14 | Percentage of farms using innovative and best management practices between 2016 to 2021 in York Region. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.

Increasingly, York Region farms are tapping into renewable energy (Figure 15).

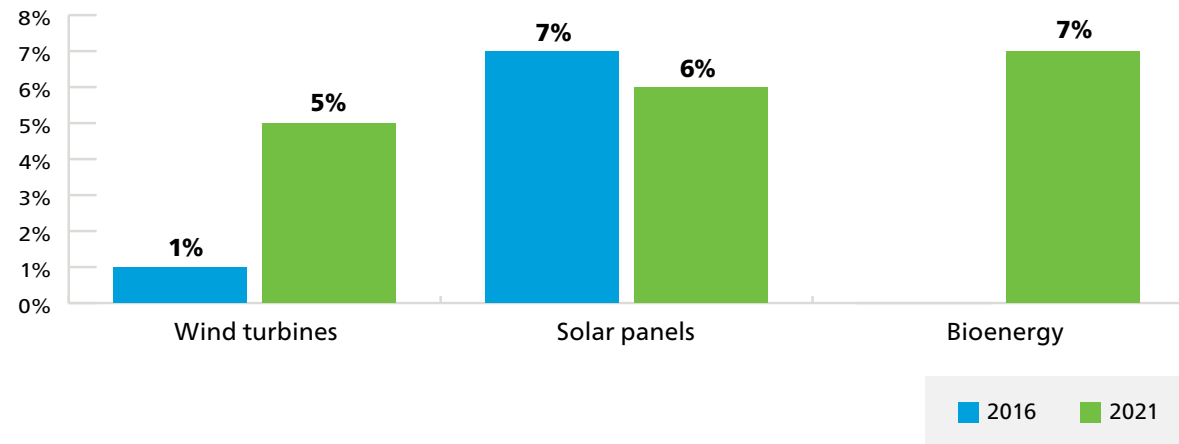


Figure 15 | Percentage of farms using renewable energy between 2016 to 2021 in York Region. Source: Census of Agriculture, 2021.



BIOENERGY

Seven percent of York Region farms use bioenergy which is a new form of renewable energy production reported in the Census of Agriculture in 2021. Most commonly in Canada, bioenergy is biomass combustion, which is the burning of organic materials such as wood and switchgrass. Other types of bioenergy include biofuel and biomethane.



4.2 The Agri-Food Value Chain

A key employer in York Region

York Region is a hub for a diversity of agri-food processing and manufacturing businesses, with nearly 5,000 agri-food businesses across the value chain (Table 9).

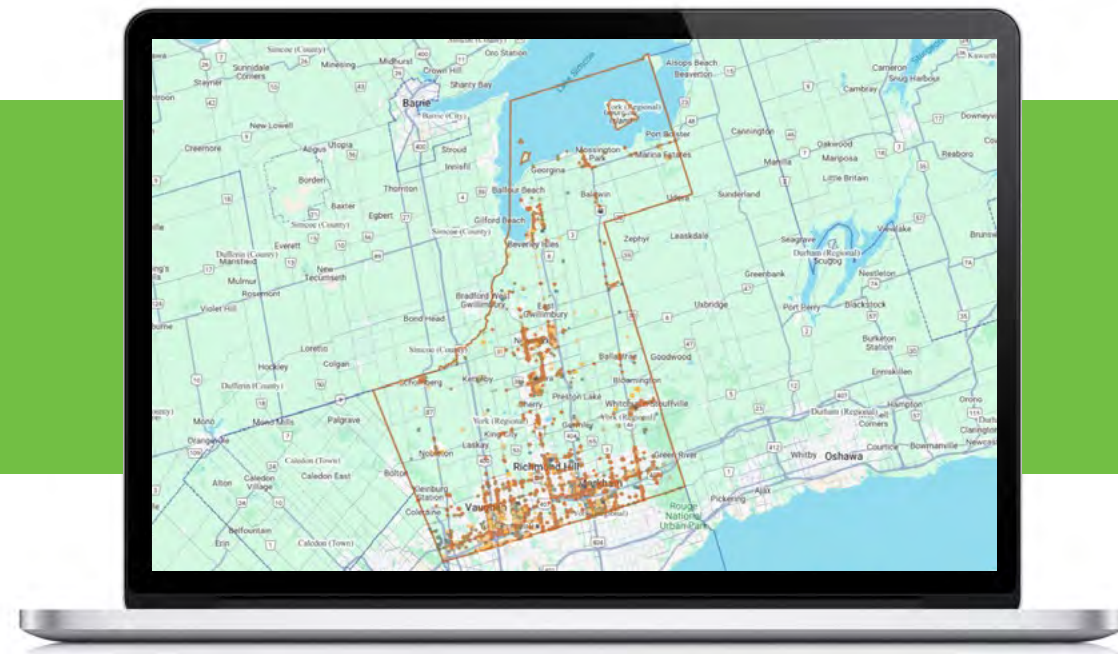


Figure 16 | York Region Agri Food businesses. Source: GHFFA's ConnectON Database, 2024.

MUNICIPALITY	NUMBER OF AGRI-FOOD BUSINESSES	PROPORTION OF TOTAL AGRI-FOOD BUSINESSES IN YORK REGION
Aurora	229	4%
East Gwillimbury	124	2%
Georgina	141	3%
King	138	3%
Markham	1,628	33%
Newmarket	300	6%
Richmond Hill	710	14%
Vaughan	1,536	31%
Whitchurch-Stouffville	182	4%
Total - York Region	4,988	100%

Table 9 | Agri-food business counts for York Region, by municipality. Source: Statistics Canada, 2023.

The agriculture and agri-food sector in York Region employs more than 67,000 people (Figure 17).

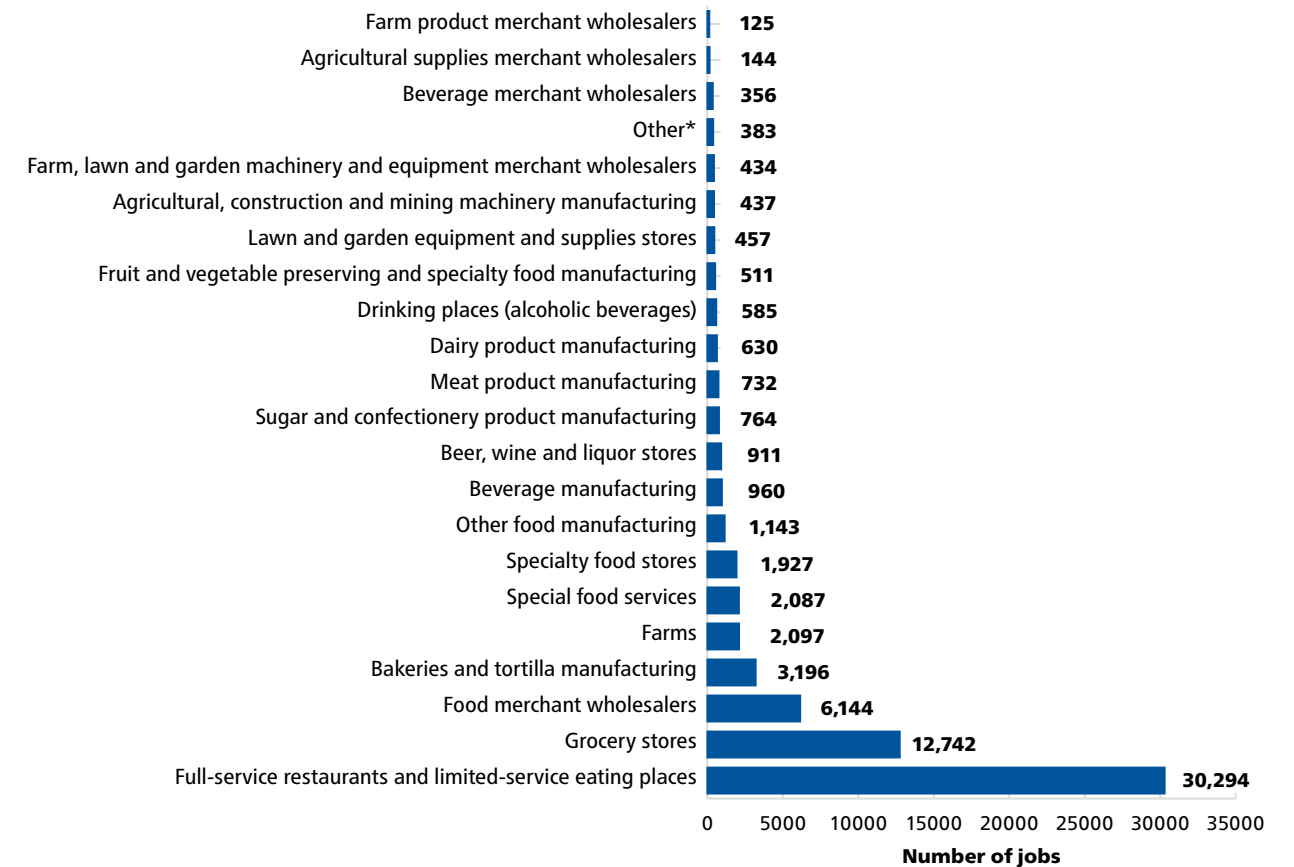


Figure 17 | York Region agri-food jobs by industry, 2022. Source: Lightcast Analyst. *Other includes: Fabric mills, seafood product preparation and packaging, cannabis product manufacturing, animal food manufacturing, support activities for farms and grain and oilseed milling.

York Region has a strong food and beverage manufacturing sector, with 11% of the Region's manufacturing jobs in food and beverage processing (Table 10).

MANUFACTURING SECTOR (NAICS CODE)	NUMBER OF JOBS IN YORK REGION (2021)
Manufacturing (31-33)	60,885
1. Transportation equipment (336)	12,780
2. Food, beverage and tobacco (311, 312)	6,610
3. Fabricated metal product (332)	5,470
4. Plastics and rubber products (326)	4,875
5. Furniture and related products (337)	4,760

Table 10 | Top five manufacturing industries in York Region,¹⁷ by employment. Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population (2021)

¹⁷ Find a complete list of all manufacturing subsectors [here](#).



One of Canada's top small and midsize enterprise (SME) food and beverage processing sectors

When it comes to food and beverage processing, York Region is the fourth largest sector in Canada with over 300 businesses and the second largest in Ontario (Figure 18). York Region food manufacturing businesses employ 8% of all food manufacturing employment in Ontario. York Region beverage manufacturing businesses account for 4% of all beverage manufacturing employment in Ontario.¹⁸

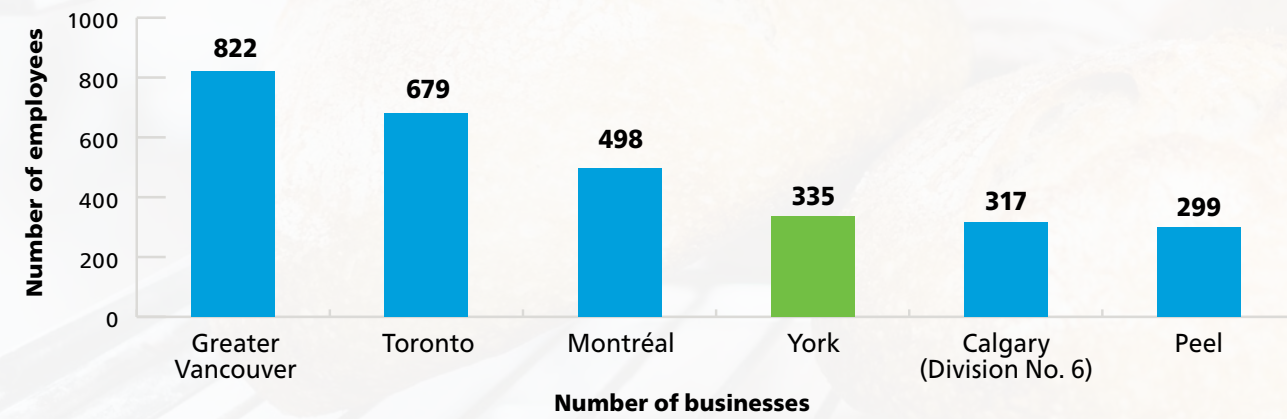


Figure 18 | Top Food and Beverage processing sector across Canada. Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Counts by Location (June 2023)

¹⁸ Lightcast, <https://lightcast.io/>, 2022

York Region is a hub for food and beverage processing SME's, ranging from small family-owned businesses to internationally recognized food and beverage processing brands.

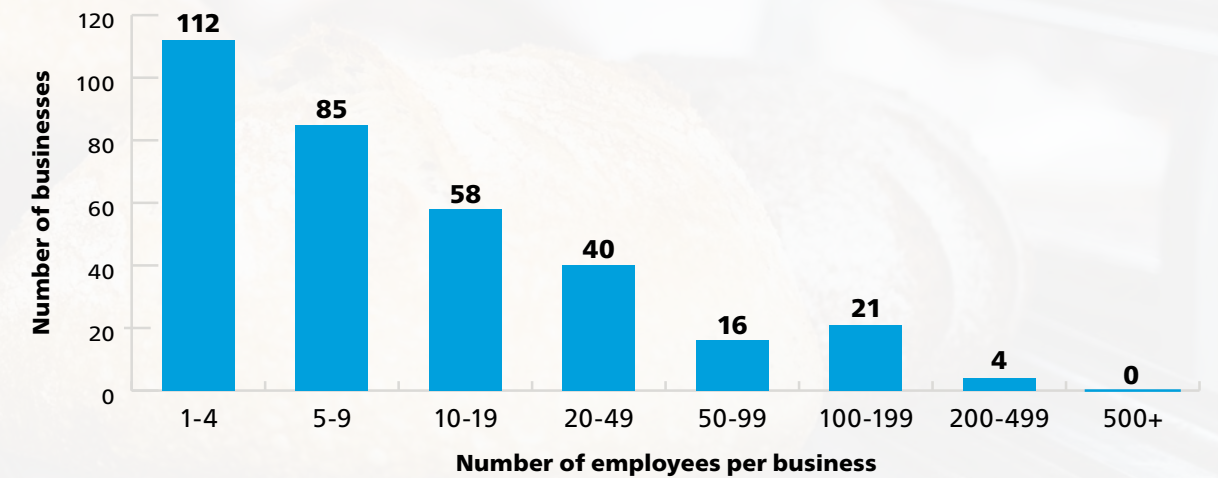
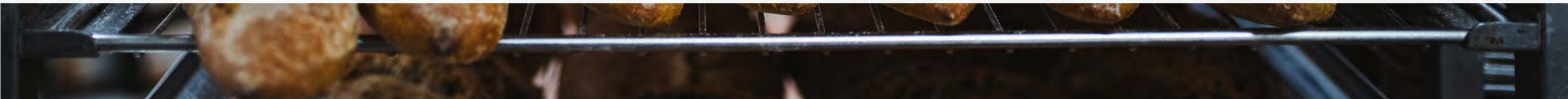


Figure 19 | Food and beverage manufacturing businesses in York Region, by number of employees (2022). Source: Statistics Canada.



5.0 What We Heard: Stakeholder Consultation Findings

Focus group attendees, interviewees and survey respondents all shared insights into the strengths, challenges, aspirations/opportunities and threats for the sector. Several key themes emerged across the engagement activities (Table 11).

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to local markets and urban centres Proximity to global export opportunities (e.g., logistics and transportation infrastructure) Diversity (including commodities, supply chain and people) Prime agricultural land and fertile, high-quality soil Local government's support for the sector Food processing infrastructure and presence across the Region Access to research and innovation expertise through local colleges and universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to agricultural land Access to mid-sized commercial kitchen spaces for small-medium sized businesses to scale up Access to agricultural inputs and services Housing (including affordability and loss of agricultural land) Labour (skilled labour, transition planning, high cost of living) Climate change mitigation and adaptation Lack of public education about agriculture (practices, food knowledge/skills, the sector as a career path) Limited infrastructure for food and beverage manufacturing and processing (e.g., cold storage facilities)
OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATIONS	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth in innovation in the agriculture and agri-food sector Growth in the agri-tech and food-tech sectors Fostering entrepreneurship and the next generation in agriculture and agri-food Supporting businesses in leveraging circular economy opportunities Continuing to support an integrated value chain Fostering equity in the agri-food system Being a leader in Canadian agri-food Storytelling to communicate the strength and importance of agriculture and agri-food in York Region Growing culinary tourism and agri-tourism in York Region Rural and agricultural lens to policy development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of primary agricultural land Climate change Global geo-political instability/conflict Aging/retiring agriculture and agri-food workforce

Table 11 | Summary of key themes from engagement activities.

5.1 Focus Groups

Focus group sessions followed a similar agenda to determine the strengths, aspirations, challenges and opportunities for the sector.

Several key messages emerged from each of the focus group sessions.

York Region staff

- Continuing to collaborate across departments will be key to the Region's success as a leader in agri-food sector economic development
- Agricultural land base must be maintained and nourished
- There is an opportunity to tap into circular economies to grow the sector
- The Region must balance housing needs and population growth with agri-food sector growth, opportunities include integrating agri-food with new developments through healthy community planning, bolstering education and promoting the sector in York Region

Industry innovation and local municipal partners

- Agricultural production must be backed by thoughtful policies (e.g., an agriculture-rural lens)
- The Region can leverage its diversity in products and people to grow the sector and be recognized as a leader in agri-food development
- Building on its existing network and assets, the Region can bolster efforts to support agri-food business incubation and acceleration (including the whole value chain, from farm to fork)

Primary agriculture

- Business retention and expansion efforts should include the whole of the agricultural system – including agricultural inputs/services, farming and processing for SME agriculture and agri-food businesses

- An agriculture/rural lens applied to Regional and local policies and policies that are supportive of agricultural business development would enable sector growth and resilience

Agri-food value chain

- Skilled labour is a key gap limiting the growth of the agri-food processing sector; a challenge that is not unique to York Region
- York Region can support the labour pool by facilitating improvements to infrastructure, accessibility and transit to enable workforce development
- York Region is ideally positioned to be a leader in value-chain entrepreneurship and business development
- York Region should champion opportunities for storytelling for the agri-food sector to promote it as a career and bolster the Region's reputation as a processing hub

Open session

- Access and availability of industrial and commercial land for food and beverage processing and other value-chain activities is limited (e.g., small scale processors looking to scale their business, livestock and crop processing facilities)
- The Region can play a role in ensuring agricultural land is valued by communicating the economic, social and environmental impact of agricultural land
- York Region can be a leader in engaging youth in agricultural education and in promoting agriculture and agri-food sector careers and entrepreneurship



“We need to ensure that we have innovation centres in York Region that are low cost and low risk for agri-food startups.”

- Interviewee



5.2 Interviews

One-on-one interviews provided opportunities to discuss specific opportunities for York Region economic development to support the growth and development of the agriculture and agri-food sector. In addition to learning about strengths and challenges/barriers for agriculture and agri-food businesses in York Region, interviewees were also asked about:

- Trends and opportunities for locally produced and/or processed agri-food in the Region
- Priorities for York Region economic development to support the agriculture and agri-food sector over the next five years
- The agriculture and agri-food sector outlook 30 years into the future



INTERVIEW DISCUSSION TOPIC	SUMMARY OF THEMES
Trends and opportunities for locally produced/ processed agri-food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate supports for entrepreneurship in agriculture and agri-food processing • Accessible spaces and resources to support agriculture and agri-food businesses development and scaling (e.g., including resources for accessing international markets) • Facilitating innovation and investment in urban agriculture sector development • Supporting farmers in adopting innovative agri-tech solutions
Priorities to support the agriculture and agri-food sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building the labour force, skills development and employment attraction and retention • Enhancing collaboration and continued partnerships with post-secondary institutions and other innovation enablers • Facilitate connections between farmers and processors with market channels to supply local and culturally relevant foods • Uplift Indigenous agriculture and equity deserving communities that operate agriculture and agri-food businesses across York Region • Help protect primary agricultural land by communicating the economic, social and environmental impact of agriculture in York Region • Lead efforts to attract food and beverage processors to York Region • Enhancing adaptation and resilience in the sector in response to a changing climate
Long-term aspirations for the Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thriving, larger, stronger, flourishing, a sector with “bragging rights” • Diverse businesses and agri-food products • The same amount of farmland across York Region • Farmers are profitable and off-farm income isn’t necessary • Everyone will recognize York Region as an agriculture and agri-food powerhouse in Canada • A global food hub/hotspot for agriculture and agri-food • A leading region where farmers have healthy soils • Well positioned to close the loop in the sector (i.e., strong circular food economy)

Table 12 | Summary of themes from interviews.

5.3 Agri-Food Business Survey

Survey respondents shared insights on the perceptions and dynamics of York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector. Three key themes emerged (Figure 20).

York Region is a good place to maintain and grow agriculture and agri-food businesses.

- 88% of the respondents feel that their businesses will maintain steady business (30%) or will grow/develop (58%) in the coming years
- 53% rated York Region as a good or the best place to do business
- Respondents commonly commented that good supports are available for small and medium enterprises in agriculture and agri-food across York Region, and that the Region generally shows strong support for the sector as an economic driver



Three top strengths of York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector:

1. High quality agricultural land and soil (80%)
2. Transportation services to move goods (60%)
3. Access to a large urban market (60%)

Three top challenges limiting York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector growth:

1. Supply chain challenges (like transportation limitations) (90%)
2. High cost of land (76%)
3. The cost of doing business (76%)

Figure 20 | Key findings about York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector identified through the open survey.

Who did we hear from?

- 61 respondents
- Over half (57%) of the respondents are farmers/producers. A quarter of the respondents work with an agriculture or food sector not-for profit organization
- Respondents mostly live in the Township of King (28%), Town of Georgina (22%), or outside of York Region (18%)
- Most respondents work in the Township of King (30%), Town of Georgina (28%), Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville (18%) and Town of Aurora (18%)¹⁹

¹⁹ For more information about who completed the survey, as well as the corresponding graphs to the survey results discussed in this section, please see [Appendix E](#).

Survey results: Business and sector outlook

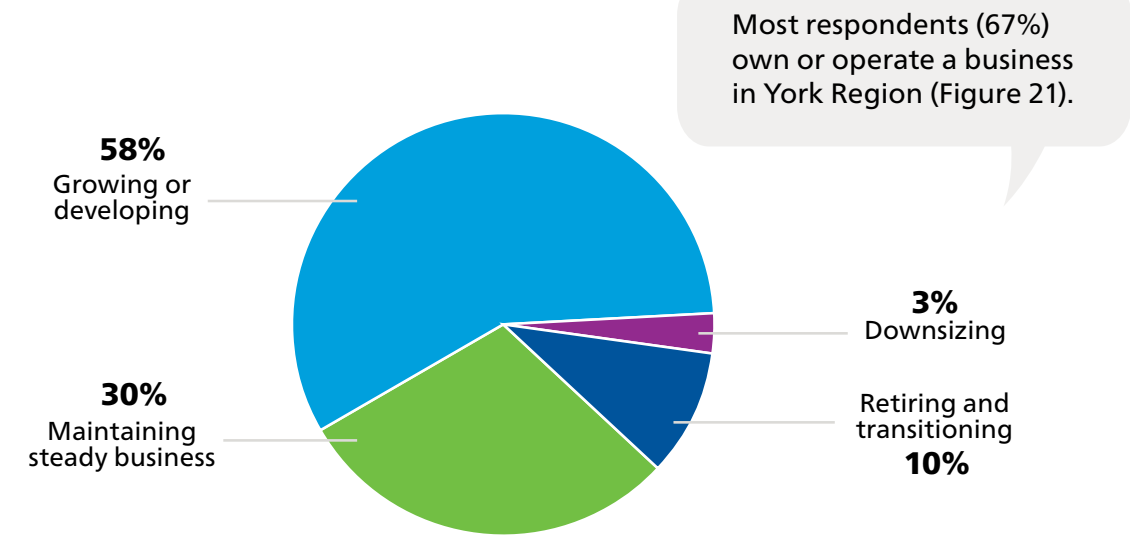


Figure 21 | State of businesses as indicated by survey respondents who own or operate businesses in York Region.

Over half (54%) of business owners surveyed feel that York Region is a good place to do business (Figure 22).

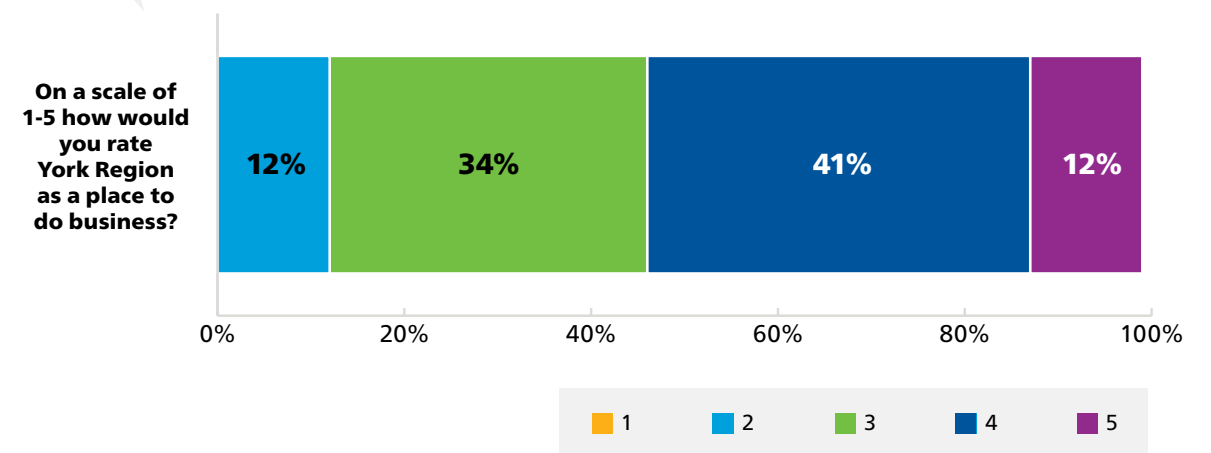


Figure 22 | Respondents’ answers to “on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=poor and 5=the best), how would you rate York Region as a place to do business?”



What we heard: How to improve the agriculture and agri-food business atmosphere in York Region

- Addressing urban pressures
- Reducing barriers to entry
- Addressing the high housing and farmland prices
- Supporting thought-out plans for member municipalities to transition out of primary agriculture (e.g., Richmond Hill) into other forms of agriculture (e.g., innovative agriculture, food processing)
- Improving infrastructure (e.g., transportation to rural locations, traffic, sidewalks, moving large equipment)
- Develop policies with an agricultural and rural lens
- Encouraging more diversity in the business space
- Educating the community on agriculture safety (e.g., interacting with livestock)
- Encouraging businesses and consumers to buy locally
- Encouraging more facilities for animal processing
- Facilitating more connections to selling to retailers and restaurants in the GTA
- More supports for small-scale, younger, and/or new farmers



In the short-term, 39% of all respondents think that the economic growth of the agriculture and agri-food sector in York Region will see moderate to significant decline (Figure 23). In 10+ years, 57% of respondents think the Region will see a general decline in the growth of the sector. The low optimism for the long-term growth of the sector may be partially explained by the high portion of farmers who responded to the survey as they see and experience the pressures facing the primary agriculture sector in the Region.

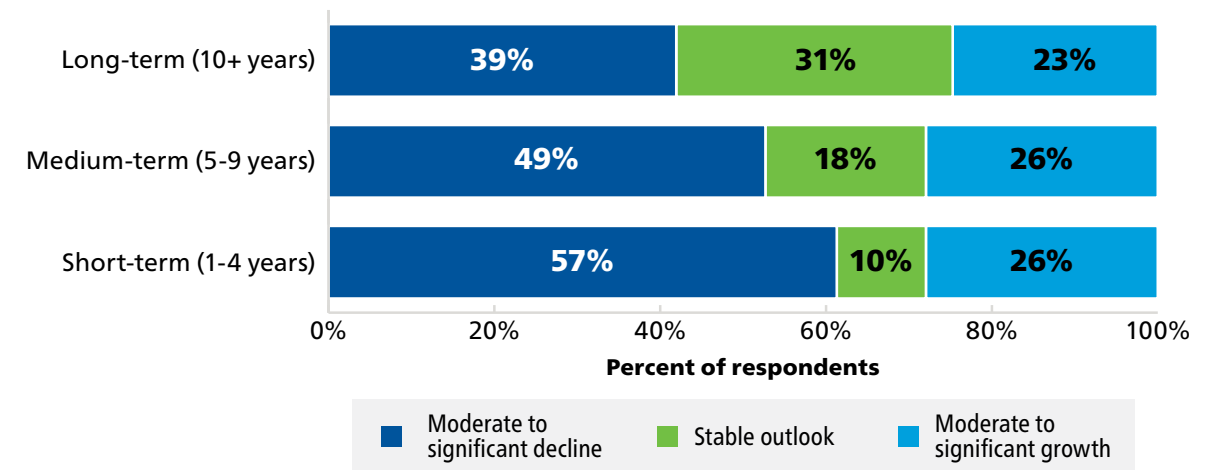


Figure 23 | Respondents' outlook on the economic growth of the agriculture and agri-food sector in York Region in the short, medium and long term.

Survey results: Strengths and opportunities for growth

The top five factors that have the highest impact on supporting the growth of the York Region agriculture and agri-food sector are:

- High quality agriculture land and soil (80%)
- Transportation services to move goods (61%)
- A large urban market (60%)
- Broadband and internet connectivity (59%)
- Labour (50%)

The top four topics/trends that support the growth of the York Region agriculture and agri-food sector include:

- Consumer interest in local food
- Agri-tourism
- Urban agriculture
- Support from Regional and/or Municipal government staff

Respondents indicated that both food and beverage processing and agri-tourism and culinary tourism have the highest potential for growth in the Region (69% each). Other industries with high growth potential include agri-food product retail and food services (67%) and agri-tech and innovation (like clean-tech) (64%).



“York Region faces the same barriers as other regions in Canada. We need to get together to address common problems.”

- Survey respondent



Survey results: Challenges

The top five limiting factors for growth in the York Region agriculture and agri-food sector are:

- Supply chain challenges²⁰
- The high cost of land
- Access to/availability of labour
- Urbanization
- Lack of government support for the sector

The top three economic issues identified by respondents include the cost of doing business, balancing housing needs with agricultural land supply, and access to labour and availability of top talent. “Other” reasons presented by respondents included:

- Infrastructure (e.g., moving farm equipment, road safety)
- Commercial space
- Training
- Meat processing/slaughter facilities
- Insufficient site services (e.g., water, power, natural gas, sewer) for advancing agriculture innovation

²⁰ Potential supply chain challenges include limitations to transportation, such as the ability to move farm equipment/road safety/poor road conditions, limited options, high costs, or seasonal variability.

Respondents shared their vision for the future of York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector by finishing the following sentence:

In five years, York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector will be...

...“a **Canadian showcase** for regional food security through effective developments and supports.”

... “forming better and closer relationships with consumers through school education and events designed to **share knowledge** and **connect** producers and consumers, and working towards building more local **processing**.”

...“recognized as one of the **top agri-food hubs in North America**, showing **leadership and innovation** by establishing a platform for expansive cross collaboration, resource sharing and knowledge translation among all SMEs across the agri-food value chain in York Region.”

... “a **role model** for sustainable business practices and demonstrate to the world how **urban and agriculture can grow and co-exist** through the proper application of technology and nutrient recovery/reuse to limit water pollution, thereby preserving the environment for future generations.”





6.0 York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy 2024-2027

The 2024-2027 Strategy has three key pillars (Figure 24). Each pillar is accompanied by several goals. The following section details each pillar, goal and associated action items. Potential collaborators and partners are identified throughout.

Implementation of the strategy will be led by York Region’s Economic Strategy team. This will be a collaborative effort with local economic development teams and partner organizations. York Region will provide regular updates on progress made towards measurable outcomes presented to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee and other key partners.

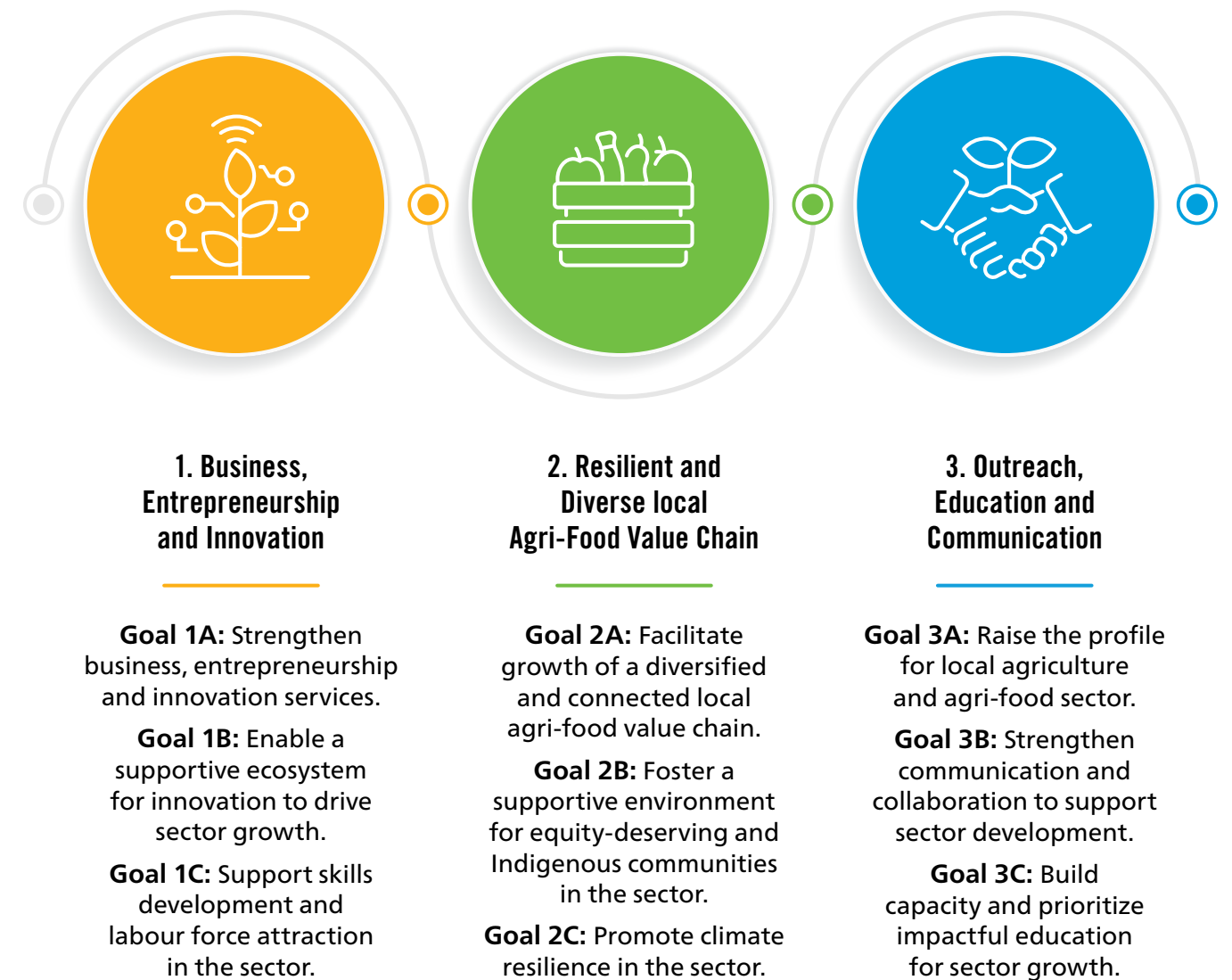
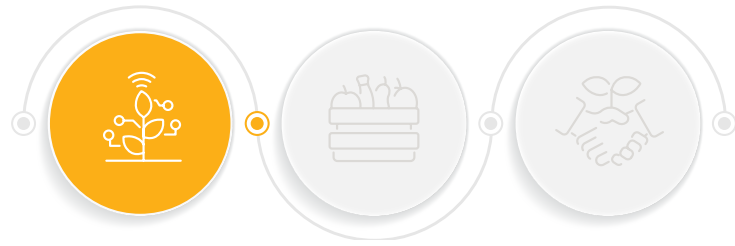


Figure 24 | Overview of Strategy 2024-2027 pillars and goals.



“We need to ensure that we have innovation centres in York Region that are low cost and low risk for agri-food startups.”

- Survey respondent 

Pillar 1: Business, Entrepreneurship and Innovation

York Region’s robust agri-food innovation ecosystem was brought forward in nearly every stakeholder engagement discussion.

York Region Economic Strategy can facilitate entrepreneurship across the entire agri-food value chain, from farm to fork and propel the Region forward as a national leader. In addition to growing entrepreneurship, enabling agri-food businesses to transition to economies of scale is a key opportunity.

Business incubators, accelerators and post-secondary institutions provide entrepreneurs across the Region with key business supports. York Region can play a pivotal role in ensuring current assets meet the needs across the sector.

York Region can also support the development and adoption of agri-tech and food-tech solutions to strengthen and grow the competitiveness of agri-food sector in the Region. Agri-tech and food-tech involves the use of technology to increase productivity and efficiency and reduce the environmental footprint of the sector. Agri-tech can include:

- Smart irrigation systems, which ensure only the necessary amount of water is applied to the crop
- Drone-enabled infrared mapping, which enables farmers to monitor the health of their crops
- Tools that improve product traceability for safety and quality considerations
- Edible coatings to reduce plastic packaging on fruits and vegetables
- Alternative protein sources, such as cell-based meats, plant-based dairy products and insects

GOALS

- 1A.** Strengthen business, entrepreneurship and innovation services in York Region.
- 1B.** Enable a supportive ecosystem for innovation to drive sector growth.
- 1C.** Support skills development and labour force attraction in the sector.

Goal 1A: Strengthens business, entrepreneurship and innovation services in York Region.

ACTION ITEM	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI / EXPECTED OUTCOMES
<p>1A.1 Provide business services and strategic sector support with partners to facilitate retention, expansion and attraction of agri-food businesses in York Region.</p> <p>This includes developing informational tools and resources to support agri-food business across York Region.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy, York Small Business Enterprise Centre, Nine local cities and towns</p> <p>Partners: Economic development stakeholders, Small Business Enterprise Centres</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of engagements per year • Increased growth of agri-food businesses in York Region
<p>1A.2 Support nine local cities and towns with investment attraction and readiness initiatives in the agri-food sector.</p> <p>This includes developing marketing materials to showcase and attract investments in the agri-food sector.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy, Nine local cities and towns</p> <p>Partners: Ontario Food Cluster, Foreign Direct Investment agencies, business community</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of agri-food resources to support investment readiness and attraction • Business opportunities are shared with local municipalities in collaboration with the Ontario Food Cluster
<p>1A.3 Promote and support agri-food business entrepreneurship and innovation programs.</p> <p>This includes agriculture and agri-food incubators and accelerators and programs for food entrepreneurs as well as agri-tech, primary production and urban farming.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy,</p> <p>Partners: York University YSpace, ventureLAB, Seneca Polytechnic, Foodpreneurlab</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs promoted via York Link Channels and bi-monthly agri-food newsletter • Number of partnerships and programs supported • Local agri-food business start-ups and expansions resulting from programs

Goal 1B: Enable a supportive ecosystem for innovation to drive sector growth

ACTION ITEM	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI / EXPECTED OUTCOMES
1B.4 Strengthen the agriculture and agri-food innovation network in York Region by enhancing the regional map of resources to support growth and promote the network.	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy Partners: York Region Public Health, York Region Food Network, Nine local cities and towns	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced regional map with more agri-food innovation assets
1B.5 Facilitate adoption of agri-tech and food-tech solutions by making connections, profiling solutions, and supporting pilots. Solutions address business challenges including climate change, food insecurity, labour, vertical and controlled environment agriculture, circular economy and carbon neutrality. Ensure equity-deserving groups have equal access to these opportunities.	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy, ventureLAB Partners: Nine local cities and towns, BioEnterprise, Ontario Centre of Innovation, OMAFA, University of Guelph Muck Crops Research Station, Seneca Polytechnic, the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs, YorkNet	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of agri-tech and food-tech solutions profiled/ success stories Increased awareness of agri-tech and food-tech solutions
1B.6 Explore opportunities to enable urban agriculture in York Region by reviewing existing policies and sharing best practices. For example, determine opportunities to enable vertical farming and urban agricultural production through education sessions.	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy Partners: Nine local cities and towns, OMAFA, GHFFA, The Barret Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of urban agriculture case studies Number of participants engaged in education sessions

Goal 1C: Support skills development and labour force attraction in the sector.

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
1C.7 Leverage industry expertise and promote resources to help employers in the agriculture and agri-food sector better understand and engage newcomer and immigrant talent.	Lead: York Region (Community and Health Services, Economic Strategy) Partners: Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC), Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA), Food Processing Skills Canada and Newcomer Inclusion Table of York Region, Agcareers, Food and Beverage – CareersNow, Workforce Planning Board of York Region	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote resources via York Link and related channels
1C.8 Continue to foster partnerships with educational institutions (i.e. post-secondary) to support skills development in the sector.	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy Partners: York University, Seneca Polytechnic, York Region District School Board, CAHRC, AgScape, OMAFA	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of participants engaged through delivery of skills development workshops with partners
1C.9 Support business succession planning initiatives for the agriculture and agri-food sector. For example, collaborate with partners to host Business Succession Planning Workshops in York Region.	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy, York Region Small Business Enterprise Centre Partners: Farm Management Canada, Nine local cities and towns, Business Development Bank of Canada, local municipal Chamber of Commerce stakeholders, Treefrog Inc.	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of participants engaged in business succession planning workshops



“The diversity in York Region paired with our ability to grow/raise a variety of foods represents a huge opportunity to replace imports.”

- Interviewee



Pillar 2: Resilient and Diverse Local Agri-Food Value Chain

As one of the most diverse regions in Canada with more than 238 ethnic groups and 5,875 residents with Indigenous backgrounds, the diversity within York Region presents an immense opportunity for agri-food sector talent, as well as consumer demands for diverse foods.

York Region is unique in terms of a mix of highly urbanized and rural communities. Farms across York Region are diverse; they range from large-scale broad-acre operations selling to merchandisers and processors to niche/specialized operations selling direct to consumers.

The Region’s ability to produce a diverse complement of foods represents a unique opportunity to replace imports and meet the local demand for culturally relevant foods. This diversity also creates a space for boosting the local economy through the growth of agri-tourism.

The strategy builds upon York Region’s [Climate Change Action Plan](#), which provides an understanding of sustainable agricultural initiatives and emphasizes climate change resiliency and greenhouse gas reduction to create a resilient sector.

GOALS

- 2A.** Facilitate growth of a diversified and connected local agri-food value chain.
- 2B.** Foster a supportive environment for equity-deserving and Indigenous communities in the sector.
- 2C.** Promote climate resilience in the sector.

Goal 2A: Facilitate growth of a diversified and connected local agri-food value chain.

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
<p>2A.1 Support and promote locally grown food and agriculture products made in York Region.</p> <p>For example, promote York Farm Fresh initiatives including the Passport to Fresh map, enable public service areas to procure locally produced food.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy</p> <p>Partners: York Farm Fresh</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual York Farm Fresh Map developed • Promotion of local food via York Link and related channels

Goal 2A: Facilitate growth of a diversified and connected local agri-food value chain.

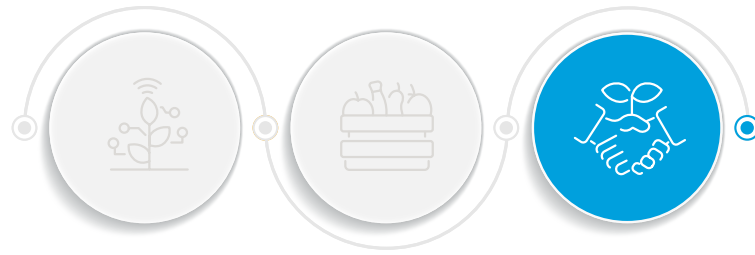
ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
<p>2A.2 Facilitate networking opportunities and collaboration between local production, processing and market channels.</p> <p>For example, the Region could host a "buyers and sellers" or "match-making" event with producers, processors, and retailers.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region</p> <p>Partners: York Farm Fresh, GHFFA, OMAFA, Nine local cities and towns and Chamber of Commerce stakeholders, Holland Marsh Growers Association</p>	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of networking events and outreach efforts to facilitate connections between producers, processors, and market channels
<p>2A.3 Support the York Region Food Council activities for enhanced coordination, alignment and collaboration of the Regional initiatives, including supporting the development of the York Region Food Charter.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region (Community and Health Services, Economic Strategy)</p> <p>Partners: York Region Food Network, York Region Food Collaborative, Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in York Region Food Council Meetings • Promote York Region Food Council resources via York Link and related channels
<p>2A.4 Support agri-tourism, agriculture-related uses, culinary tourism and on-farm diversified uses across York Region.</p> <p>This includes promoting on-farm diversified uses, agriculture-related uses and sharing resources to help link farmers looking to expand into agri-tourism with the relevant local contacts.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region, Nine local cities and towns</p> <p>Partners: York Farm Fresh, Farm Fresh Ontario, Culinary Tourism Alliance, Aurora Armoury, Seneca Polytechnic</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing guidelines and policies for agri-tourism, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses across nine cities and towns • Annual York Farm Fresh Maps promoted

Goal 2B: Foster a supportive environment for equity-deserving and Indigenous communities in the sector.

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
2B.5 Explore opportunities to engage and build relationships with Indigenous communities related to agri-food initiatives.	Lead: York Region Partners: The Mno Aki Land Trust, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, York Region Food Network, Biindigen Wellness Centre, York University, Black Creek Village, Clearwater Farm, First Nations Agriculture & Finance Ontario	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased engagement with Indigenous communities
2B.6 Conduct a research study to understand barriers and opportunities for equity-deserving entrepreneurs in the sector.	Lead: York Region Partners: York University, Black Creek community Farm, Rouge National Urban Park	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete research to understand barriers and opportunities for equity-deserving entrepreneurs in the sector
2B.7 Enable equity-deserving agri-food entrepreneurs and business owners in York Region to have access to entrepreneurship and innovation support services. For example, York Region can provide supports and resources for tailored equity-deserving group programs (see actions 1A.1, 1A.3 and 1B.5).	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy Partners: Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (Black farmer network), YSpace Food & Beverage Accelerator, Seneca Polytechnic, ventureLAB, Treefrog Inc., FoodPreneur, Black Entrepreneurship Alliance, Rouge National Urban Park, Clearwater Farm, First Nations Agriculture & Finance Ontario, Sundance Commons	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased engagement with equity-deserving agri-food entrepreneurs Number of programs supported and promoted

Goal 2C: Promote climate resilience in the sector.

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
2C.8 Conduct research study to identify climate change impacts and programs for the agriculture and agri-food sector in York Region. This includes working with industry, experts and community partners to identify climate change impacts to the agriculture and agri-food sector and generating awareness and understanding.	Lead: York Region Economic Strategy Partners: Public Works	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete study that identifies climate change impacts to the agriculture and agri-food sector
2C.9 Generate awareness and promote climate change and circular economy programs through success stories. This includes showcasing circular agri-food startups, businesses, climate smart initiatives including energy and water efficiency programs, and identifying opportunities for hosting pitch competitions for agri-food businesses that close the loop on food waste.	Lead: York Region (Public Works, Economic Strategy, Community and Health Services) Partners: Nine local cities and towns, York University YSpace, Seneca Polytechnic, ventureLAB	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote programs via York Link and bi-monthly agri-food newsletter Participate in the Climate Change Working Group meetings Complete research to identify sectors and businesses that are most vulnerable Quarterly business communications to showcase applicable programs, events and solutions



“Consumer education is the key to driving a greater interest and uptake in locally produced and prepared foods.”

- Interviewee



Pillar 3: Outreach, Education and Communication

York Region’s commitment to economic development in the agriculture and agri-food sector is unparalleled across the province. Despite the many challenges facing the sector, most stakeholders note that York Region’s support for the sector is a key strength that should be maintained. Outreach, education and communication are integral to York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector growth.

York Region’s leadership for supporting the growth of the sector can be thought of as a three-pronged approach to outreach, education and communication:

Outward: The Region should showcase the importance of its agriculture and agri-food sector to consumers and key stakeholders within the Region and with potential investors.

Inward: York Region is a trusted provider of information for the local sector. The Region should build on its successes and continue to ensure capacity building with key agriculture and agri-food sector stakeholders in York Region. These stakeholders include farmers, agri-food value chain businesses, and organizations that represent their interests.

Across York Region service areas: Continuing to communicate and collaborate across York Region’s network of staff and service areas is key to the ongoing success of the sector.

GOALS

- 3A. Raise the profile for local agriculture and agri-food sector.
- 3B. Strengthen communication and collaboration to support sector development.
- 3C. Build capacity and prioritize impactful education for sector growth.

Goal 3A: Raise the profile for local agriculture and agri-food sector.

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
<p>3A.1 Develop and execute an agri-food communications plan to communicate the impact of York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector and the importance of the land base for sector growth at local and provincial levels.</p> <p>The plan will include outreach with local food festivals and events and opportunities to celebrate local food week and other sector events.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy</p>	2025-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and execution of agri-food communications plan • Increased awareness and support of local food initiatives
<p>3A.2 Develop business success stories, spotlights and case studies to showcase the importance of agri-food businesses across the value-chain.</p> <p>Incorporate highlights of agriculture and agri-food sector career pathways into the success stories, spotlights and case studies.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy, Public Works</p> <p>Partners: York Region Federation of Agriculture, Food and Beverage Ontario</p>	2025-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of case studies/success stories per year • Promotion via York Link and bi-monthly agri-food newsletter
<p>3A.3 Collaborate with local, regional and provincial agriculture and agri-food organizations on local food projects, support and participate in related events.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy</p> <p>Partners: York Region Food Network, GHFFA, and the York Farm Fresh Associations, HMGA, local Fall Fairs (e.g., Markham, Sutton, Woodbridge, Schomberg), Rouge National Urban Park</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of partners engaged • Number of agri-food related events supported

Goal 3B: Strengthen communication and collaboration to support sector development.

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
<p>3B.4 Communicate and promote funding opportunities to agri-food businesses.</p> <p>For example, include funding program information in the agriculture and agri-food newsletter.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy</p> <p>Partners: York Soil & Crop Improvement Association, York University YSpace, Canadian Food Innovation Network</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding opportunities communicated in bi-monthly newsletters
<p>3B.5 Coordinate and collaborate on agriculture and agri-food programming across York Region and nine local cities and towns.</p> <p>For example, continue to lead the York Region Food Collaborative to align food-related programs across the Region’s service areas and facilitate the sharing of updates on economic development, rural and land use planning policies related to agriculture with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region: Economic Strategy Public Works, Public Health, Community and Health Services, Nine local cities and towns</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend York Region Food Collaborative meetings Meetings with local agriculture and agri-food economic development and planning staff to ensure alignment with agriculture and agri-food related programs
<p>3B.6 Continue to support and administer the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee.</p> <p>For example, York Region can host a bus tour to showcase local agri-food businesses with Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region (Economic Strategy, Regional Clerks)</p> <p>Partners: Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to five Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee meetings annually Integrated report to York Regional Council with the Economic Development Action Plan

Goal 3C: Build capacity and prioritize impactful education for sector growth

ACTION ITEMS	LEAD AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS	TIMELINE	KPI/ EXPECTED OUTCOMES
<p>3C.7 Collaborate with York Region community health partners to support food skills, food literacy and agricultural education activities.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region (CHS, Public Health)</p> <p>Partners: York Region Food Network, York Federation of Agriculture, You’re the Chef Food Literacy Program, Local Fall Fairs (e.g., Markham, Sutton, Woodbridge, Schomberg), Rouge National Urban Park, York Region District School Boards</p>	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of presentations/ workshops Number of participants attending workshops
<p>3C.8 Collaborate with industry associations and partners to host education and capacity-building workshops for agri-food businesses in response to emerging business challenges and opportunities.</p> <p>Workshops may include topics such as artificial intelligence, food waste reduction, on-farm diversification, and selling local food.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region</p> <p>Partners: Partners: OMAFA, the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs, York Region Federation of Agriculture, sector subject matter experts, GHFFA, York Region Soil and Crop Improvement Association, local commodity organization representatives</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of participants engaged Number of workshops
<p>3C.9 Undertake on-going agriculture and agri-food sector analysis to identify sub-sectors of relevance to the Region and develop a list of agriculture and agri-food sector businesses from farms, food processors, retailers to food service.</p>	<p>Lead: York Region Economic Strategy</p> <p>Partners: OMAFA, GHFFA</p>	Ongoing (2024-2027)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a profile for the agri-food sector Develop agri-food business list

Appendices

Appendix A: Key Accomplishments from the 2017-2022 Agriculture & Agri-Food Sector Strategy

2017 – 2022 York Region Agriculture & Agri-Food Sector Strategy Key Accomplishments

York Region was successful in delivering impactful outcomes across the Region that were outlined across five goal pillars in the 2017 – 2022 York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy. York Region worked closely with local municipal partners, the Advisory Committee, and agri-food stakeholders to implement actions in the strategy. Implementation progressed well with all of the 45 actions either completed or mobilized. Several key accomplishments achieved in the prior strategy has helped build a foundation for the success of the new strategy.



Establishment of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee

As part of the previous Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy, an 11-member Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee was established in 2018. Over the first four-year term, Committee members participated in 15 meetings to discuss and support the implementation of the strategy. Initiatives the committee undertook included input and feedback on:

- The Municipal Comprehensive Review process to update the [2022 York Region Official Plan](#)
- Research on Farm 911 (the Emily Project) that led to a Regional Farm 911 initiative to support municipalities in addressing signage for emergency response purposes

Advisory Committee members played an integral role in helping advance the objectives of the first Strategy. An industry-led agri-food sub-group with members of the Advisory Committee and other industry experts was established to support the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. The working group responded to a number of challenges through a webinar series, awareness campaign on the importance of temporary foreign workers and health and safety measures.

After a successful first term, a new Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee was elected in December 2022 for the 2023-2026 term. It includes a diverse representation of community partners across the entire agriculture and agri-food value chain including producers, urban farmers and retailers.

Establishment of the York Region Food & Beverage Accelerator in partnership with YSpace

The York Region Food and Beverage Accelerator Program was a five-month accelerator delivered by York University's YSpace annually. The program focused on supporting high-growth consumer packaged goods ventures in scaling up their operations and acquiring new distribution channels. Food and beverage startup founders are provided with the tools, skills and connections they need to scale and thrive in the consumer-packaged goods industry.

Since the project started in 2020, the program has run two successful cohorts to support 20 ventures. Collectively, the 20 ventures have generated more than \$912,000 in revenue, gained an additional 456 retail locations and created 15 new job opportunities. In addition, five companies, Appleflats, It's Souper, Oat Canada, Remix Snacks and Taltis Foods made a pitch to secure deals on CBC's Dragons' Den since the program started. Overall, the program participants have leveraged additional \$7.2 million from private and public funding.

The Town of Georgina and Town of East Gwillimbury have also initiated a partnership with YSpace to deliver a two-year Business Incubator and Accelerator pilot to support entrepreneurs and enable economic growth during the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Growing the Vertical Farming Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted consumer demand for domestically grown food and increased interest in growing food close to home, including through vertical farming. To address the growing interest and to position vertical farming as an opportunity to support economic recovery, York Region partnered with Durham Region and the OMAFA to deliver a first-of-its-kind Vertical Farming 101 webinar series in early 2022.

The series focused on topics aimed at educating and providing industry-based insights such as:

- Introduction to vertical farming
- Applied principles of vertical farming
- Navigating approvals process and permits

The series attracted more than 400 agri-food businesses and stakeholders from Canadian and international audiences, demonstrating strong interest and high demand to learn more about the topic.

York Region assisted with many other webinars throughout the previous strategy including a joint series with the City of Kawartha Lakes, the County of Northumberland, Peterborough and Kawarthas Economic Development and Durham Region. The group held joint webinars for the agricultural community targeted towards individuals interested in starting a farm business.

York Region Virtually Hosted the 2021 Ontario Agri-food Forum

The 2021 Municipal Agriculture Economic Development and Planning Forum is an annual event that brings together stakeholders from across Ontario to learn, network and celebrate our diverse agriculture and agri-food sector. York Region led the program development and hosted the event virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic restricting in-person events.

The theme for the forum was innovation and resiliency in the agri-food sector, focused on showcasing ag-tech, entrepreneurship and innovative ways of doing business and building a resilient sector due to the pandemic.

Over the two-day event more than 200 attendees joined in to learn from an engaging lineup of over 60 speakers, such as world-renowned Futurist Nikolas Badminton, local agri-food businesses and industry leaders. It also provided an opportunity to showcase York Region's diverse agriculture and agri-food sector by highlighting local businesses and key sector statistics.

Promotion of the York Region Agriculture and Agri-food Sector at a global level

York Region Economic Strategy promoted York Region's agri-food sector in a global context at Anuga Food Conference, one of the world's largest sector-focused conferences. This was a collaborative mission with the City of Vaughan and the [Ontario Food Cluster](#), which generated exposure to thousands of international attendees as staff were able to connect directly with exhibitors, attendees and support business retention efforts through meetings with global companies that have a presence in the Region.

The outcomes of this event led to significant in-person and online exposure through York Link and partner social media channels.

Collaboration with community partners

York Region supported the creation of the York Farm Fresh Organization to boost the local agri-food sector and meet the demand for direct-from-farm products. In partnership with York Farm Fresh Association, a directional farm signage program was created to guide residents to local farms. York Region also supports developing yearly guide maps to help residents find farms and local products in the Region.

Additional 2017-2022 Strategy Accomplishments

- ✓ Provided financial support for York Farm Fresh and its tools including the website and hardcopy York Farm Fresh Guide Maps, which connects communities with locally grown products through farms and farmers' markets. Additionally, this funding supported the creation of an accessible and user-friendly website which received nearly over 100,000 visits from 2018 to 2022, indicating the effectiveness of the initiative in raising awareness and engaging with the community.
- ✓ Initiated a baseline study to review local food procurement practices, focusing on Regionally operated long-term care homes in Maple and Newmarket.
- ✓ Identified best practices and recommendations for local food procurement practices in Regional facilities.
- ✓ Collaborated with the GHFFA members in identifying best practices for addressing food security and promoting local food access through a variety of initiatives. For example, the [Scarborough Fresh Food Pilot](#) to increased access to locally produced food in underserved neighbourhoods, supported urban and rural farmers, and advanced more inclusive public spaces as "nano economies." This work will help with findings ways to address food insecurity and can be applied to York's nine cities and towns.
- ✓ Developed an On-Farm Diversification Toolkit, which helps businesses navigate the municipal process for starting a farm, on-farm diversification and agri-tourism business opportunities in partnership with City of Kawartha Lakes, the County of Northumberland, Peterborough and Kawarthas Economic Development, and Durham Region.
- ✓ Created fact sheets and accessible materials to assist agri-food stakeholders in interpreting land use policies.
- ✓ York Region staff supported an onsite ag-tech robotics demonstration at the Holland Marsh in 2022 hosted by the Ag Robotics Working Group. The Ag Robotics Working Group is coordinated by the OMAFA and includes membership from Haggerty Creek Ag Robotics, industry associations, King Township, the Muck Crop Research Centre and others.
- ✓ Launched a local food awareness campaign to raise the profile for agriculture and agri-food in the Region, including a dedicated agri-food webpage, a spotlight series to showcase local farmers and businesses, and a video tour of the Region's agriculture and agri-food sector.
- ✓ Supported the development of the agriculture and agri-food asset map with local industry partners in the Region.
- ✓ Established an agri-food entrepreneur mentor program in conjunction with the York Small Business Enterprise Centre to support existing and potential entrepreneurs with mentoring and business guidance.



Appendix B: Total Economic Impact of York Region’s Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector

This economic impact assessment of York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector was developed by [Stoddart Regenerative Strategy](#).

The economic impact of primary production agriculture²¹ in York Region extends well beyond the \$390 million of direct farm operating revenue in 2021. When the indirect and induced economic activity are included the total economic impact is over \$711 million.²² The following are definitions of the three levels of economic impact used in this analysis:

- Direct economic impact is the value of the primary agricultural sales.
- Indirect economic impact is the economic activity created by the businesses that interact directly with farms such as farm supply businesses, grain elevators, veterinarians, accountants, insurance companies and vegetable processors. These are business that can be considered part of the agri-food supply chain.
- Induced economic impact is the economic activity generated by the household spending of people in the direct and indirect industries. Examples would include household utilities, groceries, housing and restaurants.

Estimating the economic impact of an industry has several challenges. Primary among them is the issue of double counting. If more than one step in a supply chain is included, the output of the further step in the supply chain will be counted as both direct output for that sector and will also show up in the indirect output of the primary step. Thus, using just the primary production output is a conservative estimate of the total economic impact.

	OUTPUT	GDP	LABOUR INCOME	JOBS
Direct	\$390 million	\$108 million	\$75 million	1,800
Direct + Indirect	\$449 million	\$152 million	\$104 million	2,500
Direct + Indirect + Induced	\$711 million	\$240 million	\$132 million	3,100

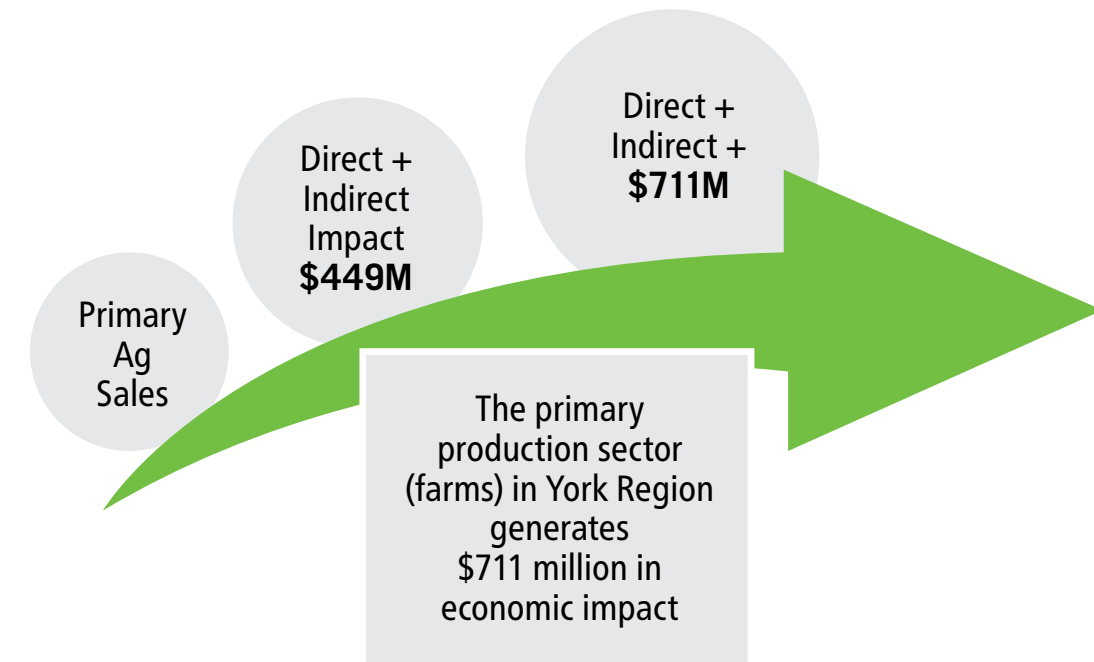
Table 13 | Total economic impact of primary production in York Region, 2021. Source: Lightcast

NOTE: Due to a change in calculation methodologies and data sources by the data provider, these numbers are not directly comparable to the 2016 results with the exception of the Gross Farm Revenue (Direct Output). The only number in the table that is directly measured at the regional level is the Gross Farm Revenue. All other values are based on modelling techniques to estimate the appropriate regional allocation and multipliers and should be considered order of magnitude estimates only.

²¹ Total economic impact has been calculated for primary production rather than the entire agri-food value chain. Primary production was selected for analysis as calculating for the entire agri-food sector tends to overstate economic contribution (due to double counting).

²² This economic impact assessment of York Region’s agriculture and agri-food sector was developed by [Stoddart Regenerative Strategy](#).

Figure 25 York Region primary production (farms) sector economic contribution. Source: Lightcast



- In 2021, estimated primary agriculture sales of \$390 million generated \$711 million in economic impact.
- This extends to:
 - \$240 million in Regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
 - 3100 jobs
 - \$132 million in wages and salaries

The indirect and induced multipliers used to calculate the total economic impact were established empirically by Statistics Canada. The national multipliers show the direct, indirect, and induced effects on gross output, GDP and jobs. They are derived from the Statistics Canada input-output tables and are used to assess the effects on the economy of a given industry. They provide a measure of the interdependence between an industry and the rest of the economy. The data used to generate this report was modelled by a third-party data provider to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. They use a sophisticated model to create regional data and multipliers based on the Statistics Canada data and other data sets.



Table 14 provides estimates of the output, GDP, labour income, and jobs generated by the entire agri-food industry in York Region. The direct contribution the sector creates \$3.8 billion in economic output (up 41% since 2016), \$2.1 billion in labour income (up 17%) and 59,000 jobs (up 4%). The indirect and induced impacts have not been presented to avoid double-counting as mentioned previously in this section.

	OUTPUT	LABOUR INCOME	JOBS
2021 Direct	\$3.8 Billion	\$2.1 Billion	59,000
2016 Direct	\$2.7 Billion	\$1.8 Billion	57,000
Increase	41%	17%	4%

Table 14 | Total direct impact of the agri-food industry in York Region. Source: Lightcast

NOTE: These numbers are not as impacted by the modelling changes of the data provider. The changes from 2016 to 2021 are directionally accurate. However, it should be noted that 2021 was the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore, economic output and job numbers were still impacted by government restrictions on business openings. It is unclear why gross sales was proportionately less impacted.

Table 15 shows the size of the Agri-Food Industry relative to the Golden Horseshoe, Ontario and Canada based on gross sales.

	AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY SALES	YORK REGION AS A % OF JURISDICTION
Canada	\$528 Billion	2.63%
Ontario	\$192 Billion	7.21%
Golden Horseshoe	\$68 Billion	20.15%
York Region	\$13 Billion	

Table 15 | York Region’s agri-food industry sales as a portion of jurisdictions. Source: Lightcast

NORTH AMERICAN INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM (NAICS) CODE	DESCRIPTION
1110 (includes 111 and 112)	Farms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 111 - Crop production • 112 - Animal production and aquaculture
1150 (includes 1151 and 1152)	Support activities for farms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1151 – Support activities for crop production • 1152 - Support activities for animal production
3111	Animal food manufacturing
3112	Grain and oilseed milling
3113	Sugar and confectionery product manufacturing
3114	Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing
3115	Dairy product manufacturing
3116	Meat product manufacturing
3117	Seafood product preparation and packaging
3118	Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing
3119	Other food manufacturing
3121	Beverage manufacturing
3253	Pesticide, fertilizer and other agricultural chemical manufacturing
3254	Pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing
3331	Agricultural, construction and mining machinery manufacturing
4111	Farm product merchant wholesalers
4131	Food merchant wholesalers
4132	Beverage merchant wholesalers
4171	Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment merchant wholesalers
4183	Agricultural supplies merchant wholesalers
4442	Lawn and garden equipment and supplies retailers
4451	Grocery and convenience retailers
4452	Specialty food retailers
4453	Beer, wine and liquor retailers
4931	Warehousing and storage
7223	Special food services
7225	Full-service restaurants and limited service eating places

Table 16 | NAICS codes and their descriptions used for the total economic impact analysis. Source: Lightcast

Appendix C: Insights into York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Competitiveness

The agriculture and agri-food sector's competitiveness and growth can be observed through using two metrics; the Provincial Location Quotient and the Competitive Effect.

The Provincial Location Quotient: The concentration of employed workers in a region relative to the provincial average. It can reveal what makes the region "unique" in comparison to the provincial average.

The Competitive Effect: Indicates how much of the job change within a given region is the result of some unique competitive advantage of the region. This is because the competitive effect, by definition, measures the job change that occurs within a regional industry that cannot be explained by broader trends.

Using these two indicators, we can assess the competitiveness of agri-food sectors (Figure 27). These insights can enable York Region to tailor supports for agri-food sectors based on their unique challenges and opportunities.

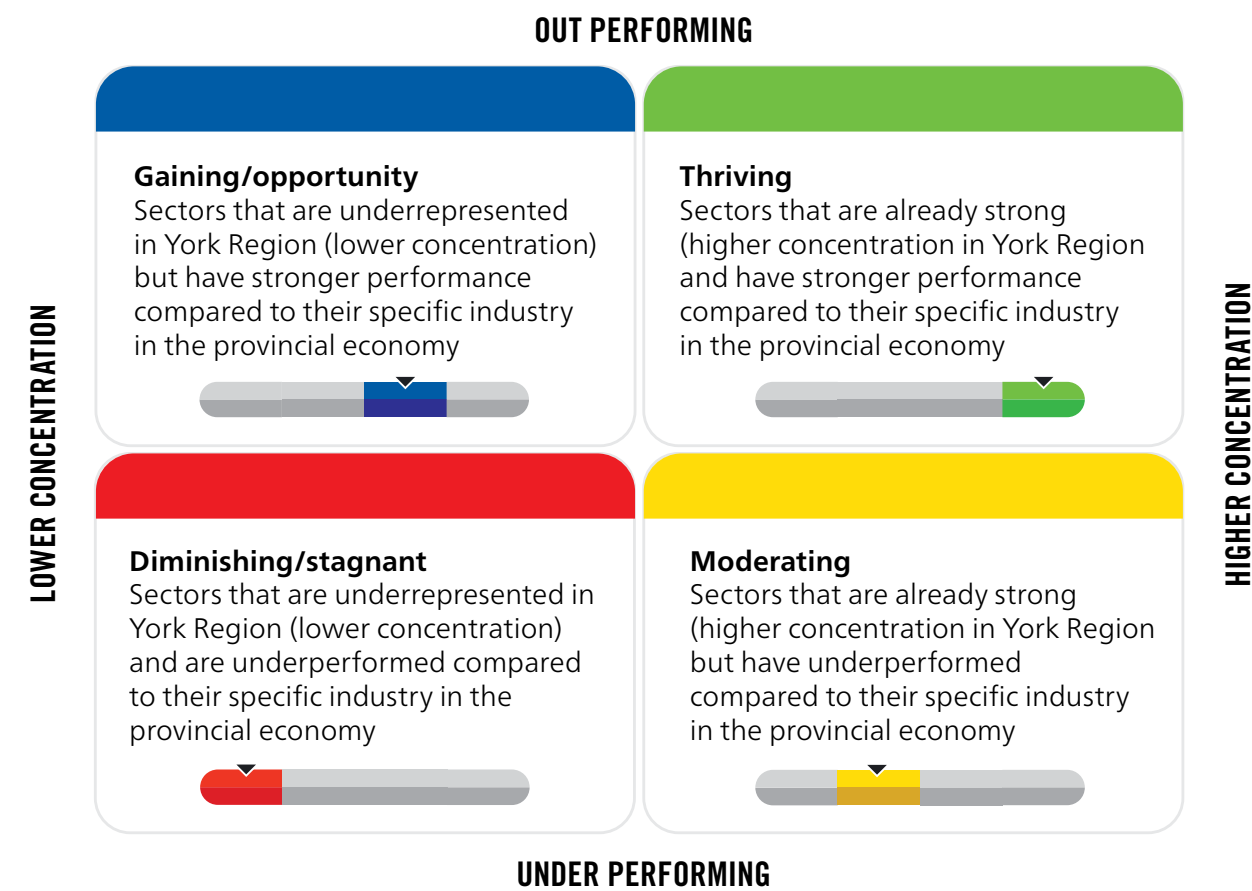
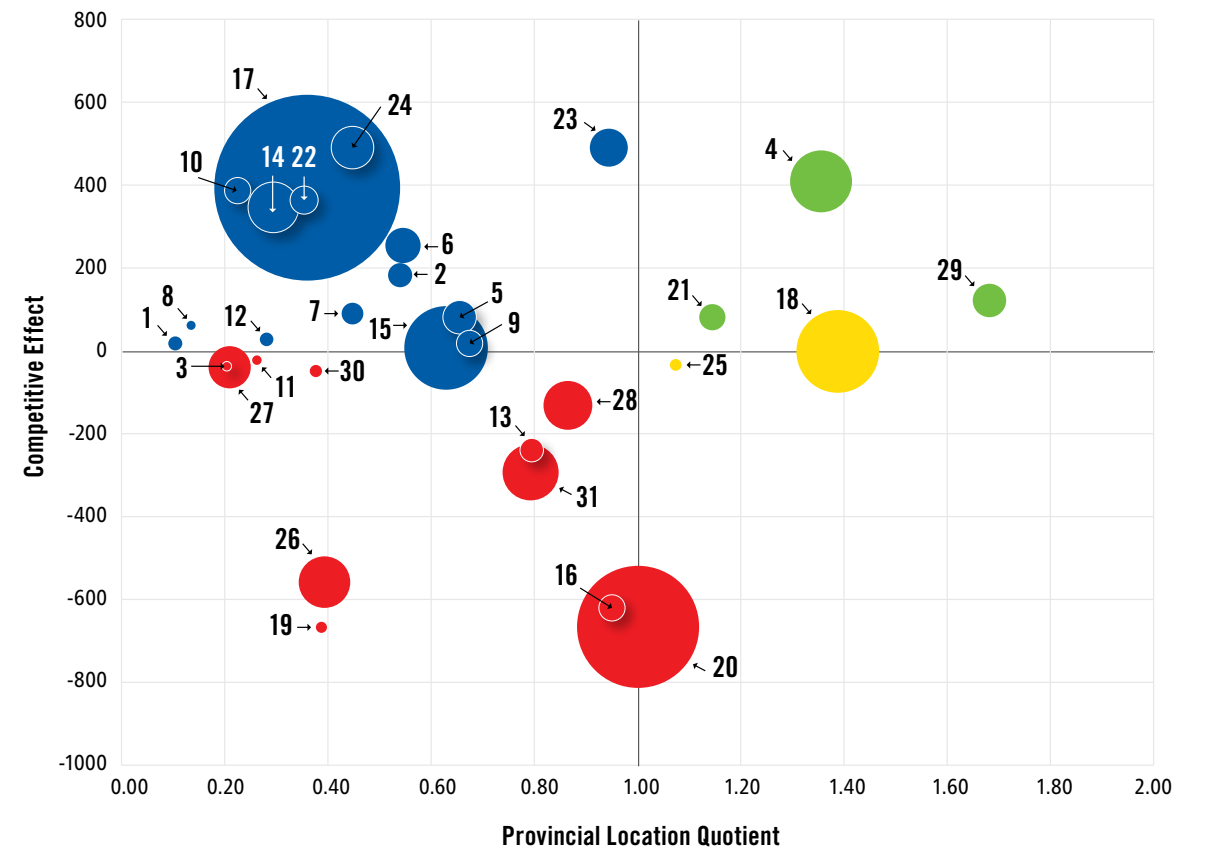


Figure 26 | Schematic of how to assess sector competitiveness using provincial location quotient and competitive effect.



LEGEND

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1. Agricultural supplies merchant wholesalers | 13. Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment merchant wholesalers | 23. Other food manufacturing |
| 2. Agricultural, construction and mining machinery manufacturing | 14. Farms | 24. Rail transportation |
| 3. Animal food manufacturing | 15. Food merchant wholesalers | 25. Seafood product preparation and packaging |
| 4. Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing | 16. Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing | 26. Special food services |
| 5. Beer, wine, and liquor stores | 17. Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places | 27. Specialized freight trucking |
| 6. Beverage manufacturing | 18. General freight trucking | 28. Speciality food stores |
| 7. Beverage merchant wholesalers | 19. Grain and oilseed milling | 29. Sugar and confectionery |
| 8. Cannabis product manufacturing | 20. Grocery stores | 30. Support activities for farms |
| 9. Dairy product manufacturing | 21. Lawn and garden equipment and supplies stores | 31. Warehouse and storage |
| 10. Drinking places (alcoholic beverages) | 22. Meat product manufacturing | |
| 11. Fabric mills | | |
| 12. Farm product merchant wholesalers | | |

Figure 27 | Competitive Effect vs. Provincial Location Quotient for the agri-food industry in York Region, 2017-2022. Bubble size represents total employment in the sector. Red indicates the sector is diminishing, blue that that sector is gaining, yellow that the sector is moderating and green that the sector is thriving.²³ Source: Lightcast, 2022

²³ Please note specialized freight trucking, warehousing and storage, general freight trucking, and rail transportation sectors were included in the analysis as stakeholders frequently noted logistics/transportation as a key agri-food sector strength in York Region. The transportation sectors were not isolated for agriculture and agri-food sector specific activities [Regenerative Strategy](#).

Several agriculture and agri-food sub-sectors in York Region are thriving and show promise for growth. York Region’s agri-food value chain (further processing and value-added agri-food sectors) perform strongly compared to the provincial economy. This includes sectors like beverage manufacturing, dairy product manufacturing and meat product manufacturing. Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing, and sugar and confectionary product manufacturing remain strong in York Region.

The following table represents which quadrant each sector falls into.

GAINING	THRIVING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agricultural supplies merchant wholesalers Agricultural, construction and mining machinery manufacturing Beer, wine and liquor stores Beverage manufacturing Beverage merchant wholesalers Cannabis product manufacturing Dairy product manufacturing Drinking places (alcoholic beverages) Farm product merchant wholesalers Farms Food merchant wholesalers Full-service restaurants and limited service eating places Meat product manufacturing Other food manufacturing Rail transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing Lawn and garden equipment and supplies stores Sugar and confectionery product manufacturing
DIMINISHING	MODERATING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal food manufacturing Fabric mills Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment merchant wholesalers Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing Grain and oilseed milling Grocery stores Special food services Specialized freight trucking Specialty food stores Support activities for farms Warehousing and Storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General freight trucking Seafood product preparation and packaging

Table 17 | Competitive Effect vs. Provincial Location Quotient for the agri-food industry in York Region, 2017-2022. Red indicates the sector is diminishing, blue that that sector is gaining, yellow that the sector is moderating and green that the sector is thriving.

Shift-Share Analysis Results (Detailed)

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY SECTORS²⁴	2006-2016	2017-2022
Agricultural supplies merchant wholesalers	• GAINING	• GAINING
Agricultural, construction and mining machinery manufacturing	• DIMINISHING	• GAINING
Animal food manufacturing	• DIMINISHING	• DIMINISHING
Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing	• THRIVING	• THRIVING
Beer, wine, and liquor stores	• GAINING	• GAINING
Beverage manufacturing	• GAINING	• GAINING
Beverage merchant wholesalers	• DIMINISHING	• GAINING
Cannabis product manufacturing	–	• GAINING
Dairy product manufacturing	• GAINING	• GAINING
Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	–	• GAINING
Fabric mills	–	• DIMINISHING
Farm product merchant wholesalers	• DIMINISHING	• GAINING
Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment merchant wholesalers	• DIMINISHING	• DIMINISHING
Farms	• GAINING	• GAINING
Food merchant wholesalers	• THRIVING	• GAINING
Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing	• THRIVING	• DIMINISHING
Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places	• GAINING	• GAINING
General freight trucking	–	• MODERATING
Grain and oilseed milling	• DIMINISHING	• DIMINISHING
Grocery stores	• GAINING	• DIMINISHING
Lawn and garden equipment and supplies stores	• MODERATING	• THRIVING
Meat product manufacturing	• GAINING	• GAINING
Other food manufacturing	• GAINING	• GAINING
Pesticide, fertilizer and other agricultural chemical manufacturing	• DIMINISHING	–
Rail transportation	–	• GAINING
Seafood product preparation and packaging	• DIMINISHING	• MODERATING
Special food services	• DIMINISHING	• DIMINISHING
Specialized freight trucking	–	• DIMINISHING
Specialty food stores	• GAINING	• DIMINISHING
Sugar and confectionery	• THRIVING	• THRIVING
Support activities for farms	• GAINING	• DIMINISHING
Warehouse and storage	• THRIVING	• DIMINISHING

Table 18 | Provincial Location Quotient vs. Competitive Effect for York Region agri-food industry sectors for 2006-2016 and 2017-2022. Blue indicates the sector is gaining, green indicates thriving, red indicates diminishing and yellow indicates moderating.

²⁴ Find all NAICS codes represented in [Appendix D](#).

Appendix D: NAICS Codes Represented

NAICS CODE	DESCRIPTION
1110 (includes 111 and 112)	Farms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 111 - Crop production • 112 - Animal production and aquaculture
1150 (includes 1151 and 1152)	Support activities for farms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1151 – Support activities for crop production • 1152 - Support activities for animal production
3111	Animal food manufacturing
3112	Grain and oilseed milling
3113	Sugar and confectionery product manufacturing
3114	Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food manufacturing
3115	Dairy product manufacturing
3116	Meat product manufacturing
3117	Seafood product preparation and packaging
3118	Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing
3119	Other food manufacturing
3121	Beverage manufacturing
3123	Cannabis production manufacturing
3132	Fabric mills
3253	Pesticide, fertilizer and other agricultural chemical manufacturing
3254	Pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing
3331	Agricultural, construction and mining machinery manufacturing
4111	Farm product merchant wholesalers
4131	Food merchant wholesalers
4132	Beverage merchant wholesalers
4171	Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment merchant wholesalers
4183	Agricultural supplies merchant wholesalers
4442	Lawn and garden equipment and supplies retailers
4451	Grocery and convenience retailers
4452	Specialty food retailers
4453	Beer, wine and liquor retailers
4821	Rail transportation
4841	General freight trucking
4842	Specialized freight trucking
4931	Warehousing and storage
7223	Special food services
7224	Drinking place (alcoholic beverages)
7225	Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places

Table 19 | NAICS codes and their descriptions used throughout the strategy.

Appendix E: Agri-Food Business Survey Results

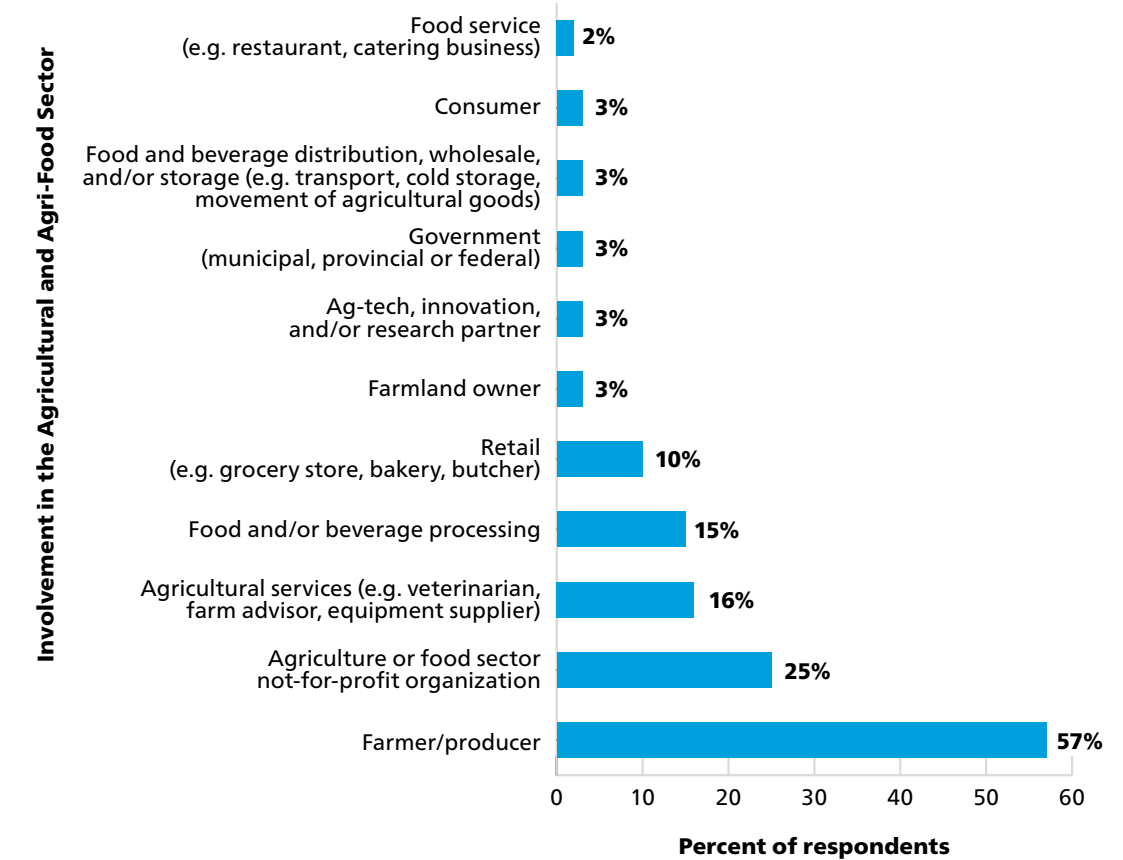


Figure 28 | Respondent's involvement in the agriculture and agri-food sector. Respondents could select multiple answers.

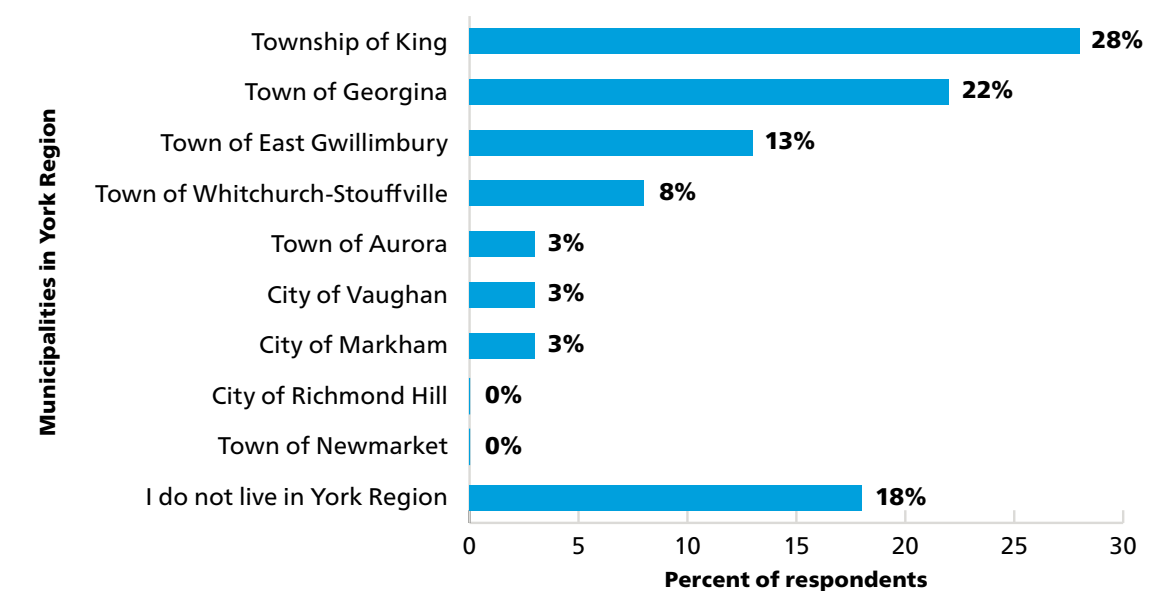


Figure 29 | York Region municipalities respondents live in.

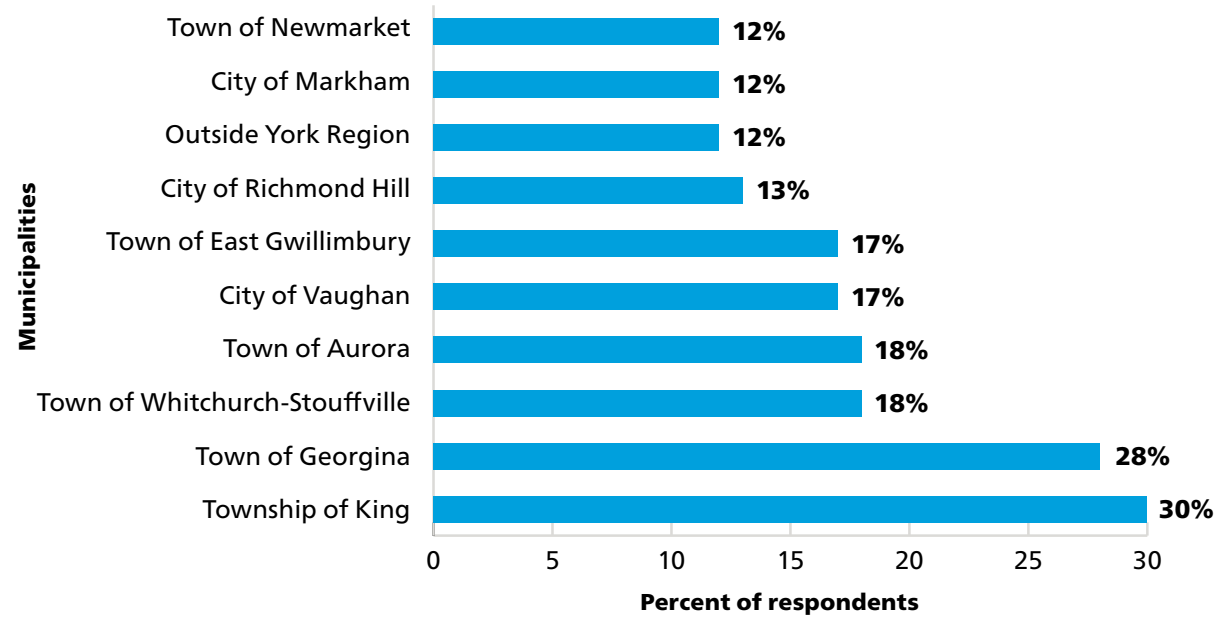


Figure 30 | York Region municipalities respondents work in. [Could select multiple answers]

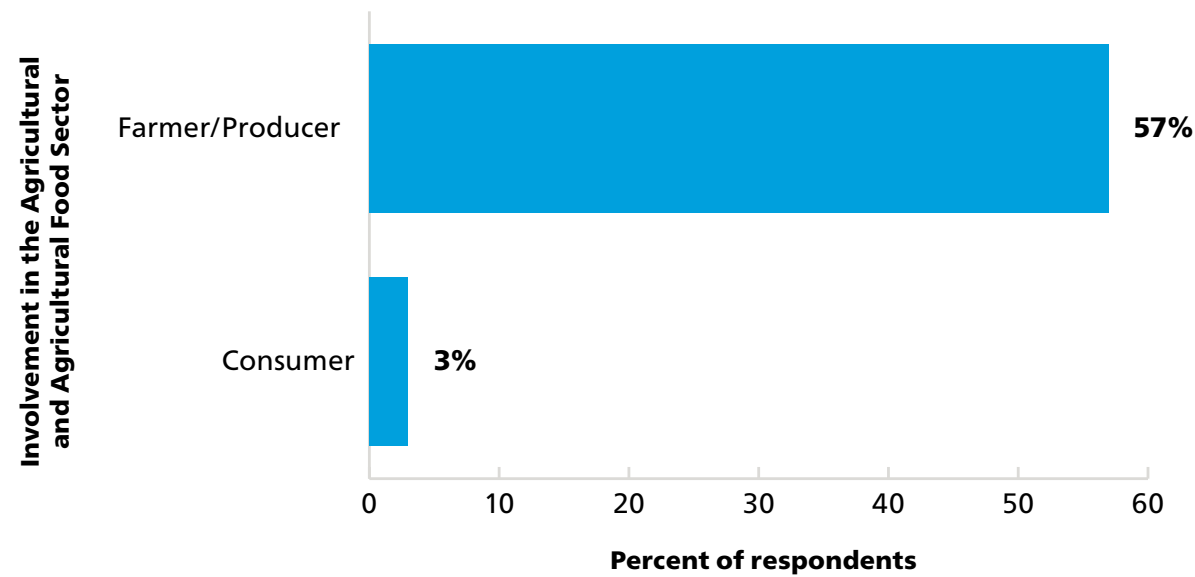


Figure 31 | Respondent's involvement in the agriculture and agri-food sector. [Could select multiple answers]

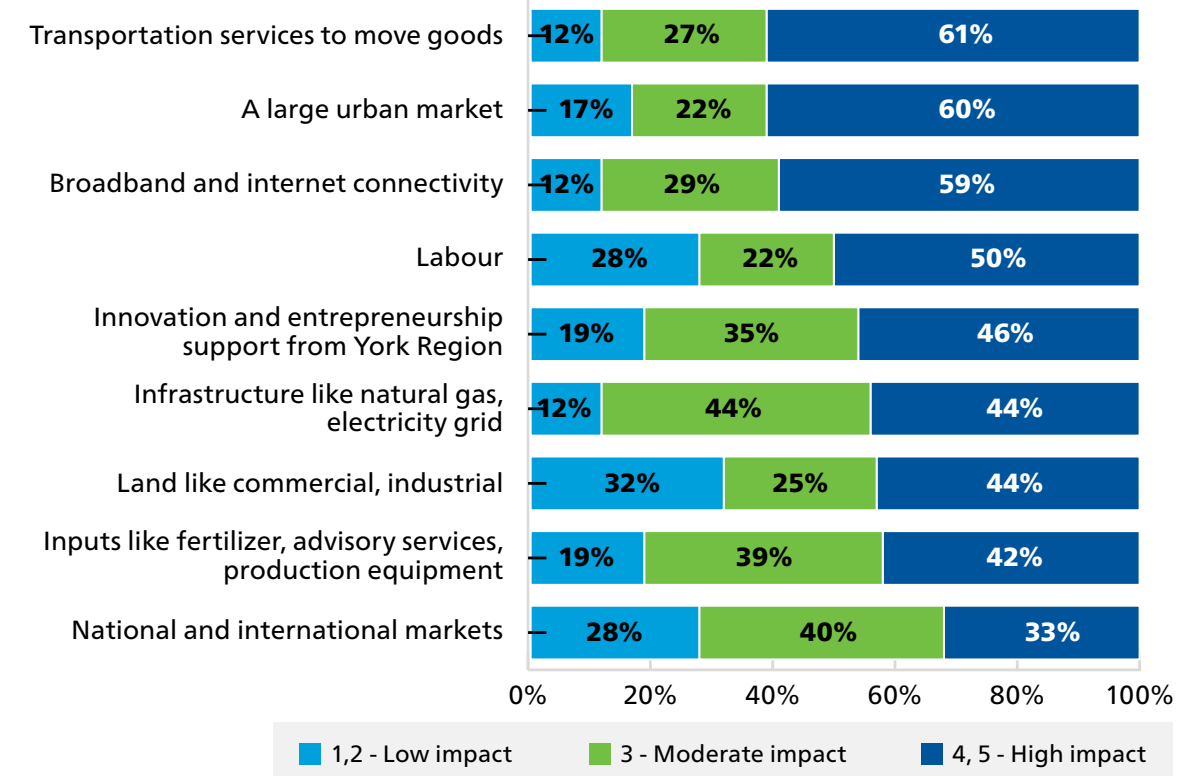


Figure 32 | Respondents' ratings for how much each factor currently supports the growth of York Region's agricultural and agri-food sector.

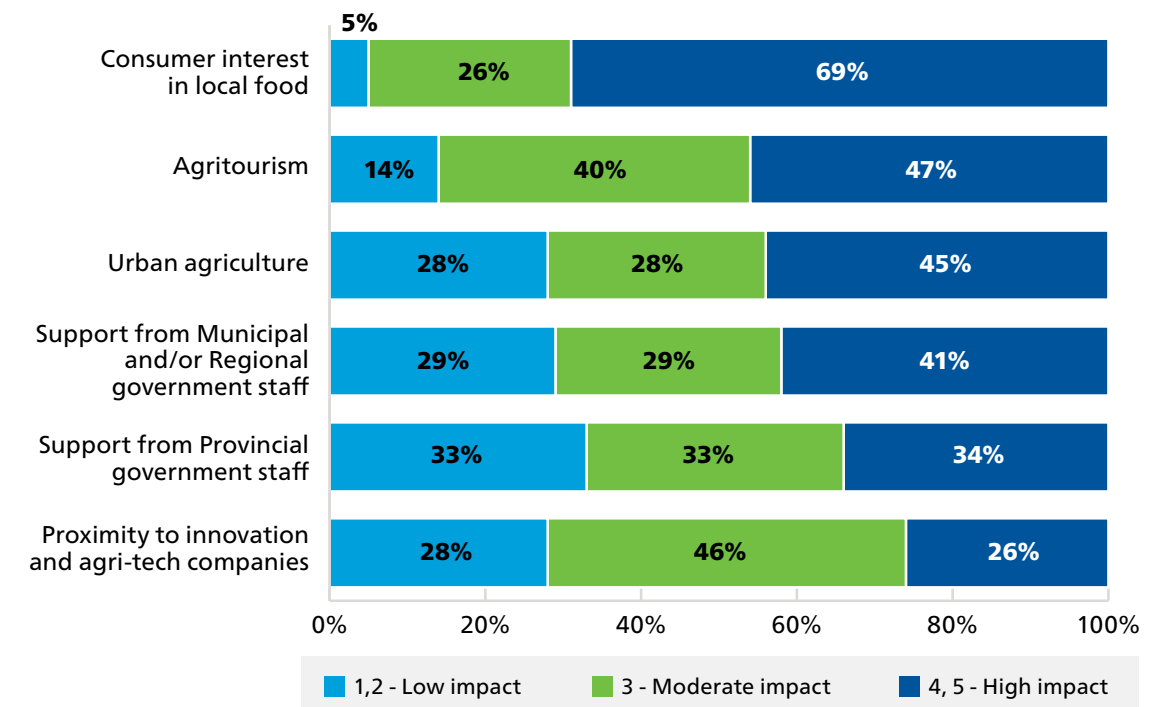


Figure 33 | Respondents' ratings for topics/trends that support the growth of the York Region agriculture and agri-food sector.

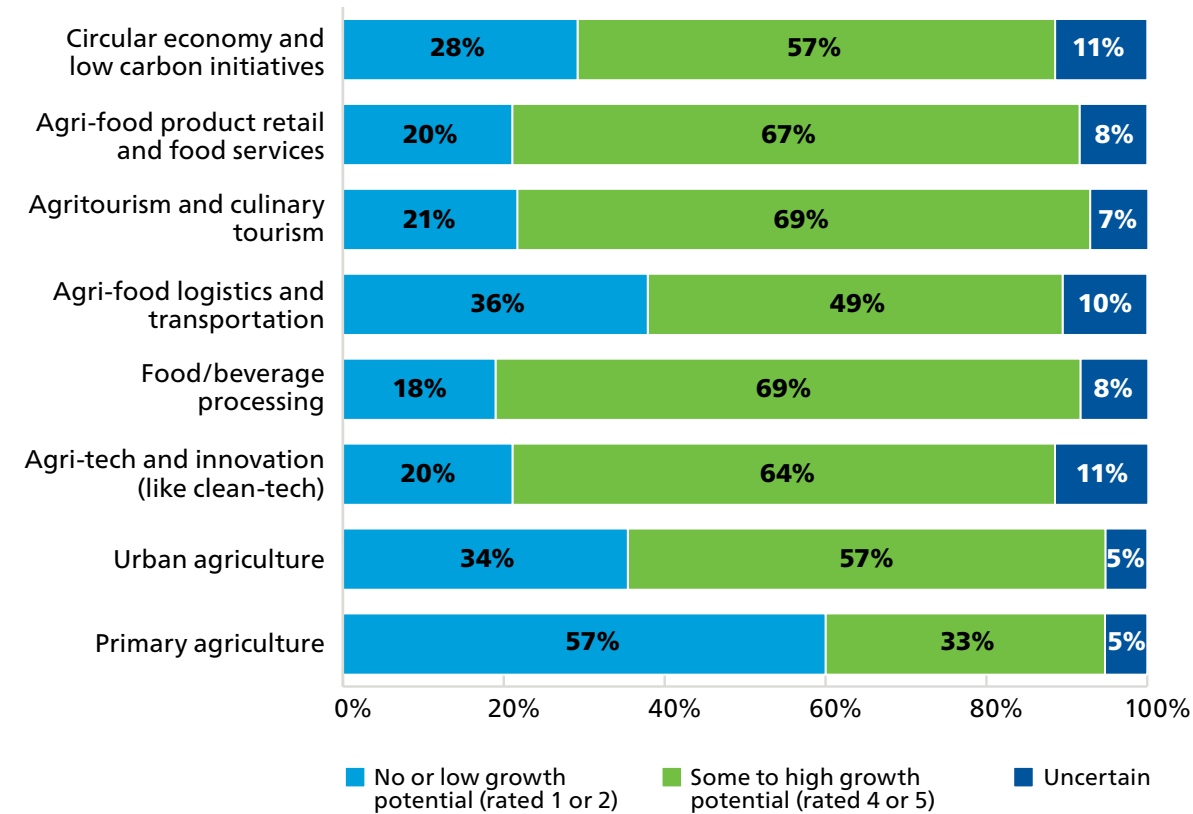


Figure 34 | Respondents' ratings on the growth potential of different industries in York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector.

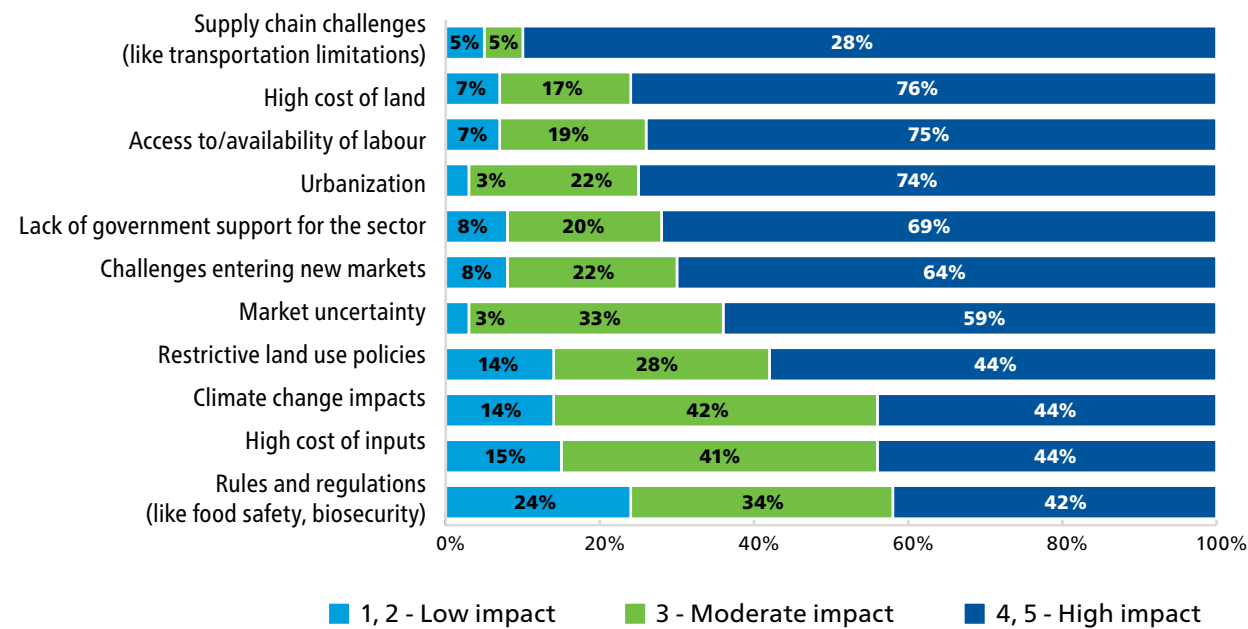


Figure 35 | Respondents' ratings for topics based on how much they limit the growth of York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector.

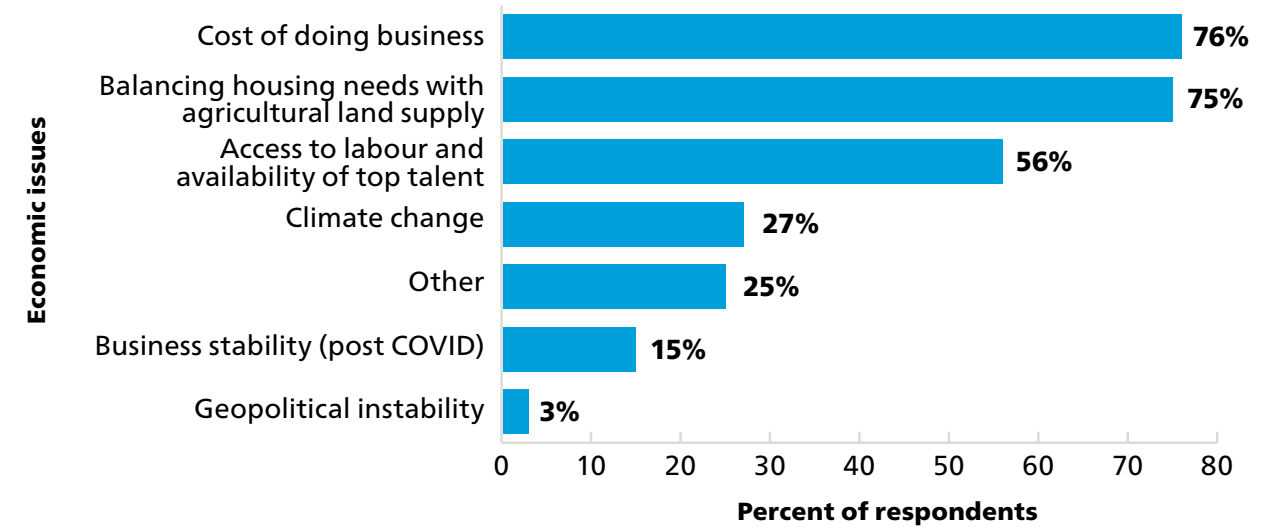


Figure 36 | Respondents' identification of the top economic issues that impact York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector.



Appendix F: Glossary of Terms

Agriculture and Agri-food Advisory Committee: Provides advice on agriculture, agri-food, and rural matters in York Region. Provides input on, and supports the implementation of actions from, the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy.²⁵

Agriculture and agri-food sector: Spans from farm inputs and services and farm to fork, including agricultural services (e.g., veterinarians), primary producers (i.e., farmers), food processors, grocery stores and restaurants.²⁶

Agriculture-related uses: means those farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.²⁷

Agri-food businesses: Encompasses farms, food processors, food distributors and logistics companies, support service companies for agriculture and agri-food, retailers, restaurants and food services.

Agri-food processing: The process through which farm commodities are used to prepare foods and beverages.

Agri-food value chain: Agri-food value chains focus specifically on the economic aspects of food production and distribution. They represent the sequence of activities and processes involved in bringing agricultural products from farm to fork. Agri-food value chains emphasize the creation and distribution of economic value along the various stages of production, processing, distribution and marketing.

They often highlight the relationships and interactions among different actors within the chain, such as farmers, input suppliers, processors, wholesalers, retailers and consumers. Agri-food value chains aim to optimize efficiency, reduce

costs, improve quality and increase competitiveness within the food industry.

Agri-tech: Agricultural technology, or agri-tech, is the application of technology to produce more with less, to make the farming process more efficient, from field monitoring to the food supply chain itself.

Agri-tourism: Farm-related tourism, including limited accommodation such as a bed and breakfast, that promote enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation.²⁸

Bioenergy: A type of renewable energy production that includes biomass combustion (i.e., the burning of organic materials such as wood and switchgrass), biofuel, and biomethane.²⁹

Circular economy: Values waste and maximizes diversion from landfill through such efforts as recycling, composting and reusing materials.³⁰

Competitive effect: Indicates how much of the job change within a given region is the result of some unique competitive advantage of the region. This is because the competitive effect, by definition, measures the job change that occurs within a regional industry that cannot be explained by broader trends.

Culinary tourism: Engaging in “unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences, as well as agri-tourism experiences” that enable participants to connect with local food production and preparation.³¹

Direct farm marketing: Farmers selling their products directly to consumers.

Environmental best management practices: Practices that producers can implement to conserve soil and water³² and/or reduce their carbon footprints while maintaining productivity.

Equity-deserving groups: Equity-deserving groups are communities that experience significant collective barriers in participating in society. This could include attitudinal, historic, social and

environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and transgender status, etc. Equity deserving groups are those that identify barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination and actively seek social justice and reparation.

Farm operator: Farm operator is a person responsible for the management decisions in operating an agricultural operation.³³ Farms can have more than one operator.

Farmland area: refers to land owned or operated by an agricultural operation. It includes cropland, summerfallow, improved and unimproved pasture, woodlands and wetlands, all other land (including idle land, and land on which farm buildings are located). It includes land that is owned or rented.

Food insecurity: Ranges from worrying about affording food to eating less nutritious meals, to going whole days without food due to not having enough money.³⁴

Food system: Describes the various stakeholders, including farmers, producers, processors, distributors, retailers, consumers, policymakers and waste management organizations. Food systems consider not only the physical flow of food but also the socio-economic and environmental aspects associated with food production and consumption. The food system includes issues such as food security, nutrition, sustainability, food safety, food sovereignty and equity.

Gross farm cash receipts: “The cash income received from the sale of agricultural commodities as well as direct program payments made to support or subsidize the agriculture sector.”³⁵ To avoid double counting, excludes inter-farm sales within a province.³⁶





Gross farm operating revenue:

Includes revenue from:

- Custom and contract feeding
- Sales of livestock
- Program payments
- The sale of agricultural products, custom and contract work
- Agri-tourism³⁷

Local: For the purpose of this strategy, we define local as grown, raised or processed in York Region. This includes food and agricultural products produced and processed in York Region and sold in Ontario, across Canada, or into international markets.

There is also consideration for alignment with Foodland Ontario definition of food grown or processed in Ontario to support regional production and processes, and acknowledge availability constraints.

Net farm revenue: Farm revenue after farm operating expenses (e.g., crop inputs, livestock feed, land rent, heating fuel, and electricity)³⁸ are deducted from the gross farm revenue.

North American Industry Classification System: A classification structure that focuses on the supply side of the industrial structure. Used by the statistical agencies of Canada, Mexico and the United States.³⁹

No till or zero-till seeding: An agricultural practice where seeds are planted directly into the soil without tilling or disturbing the soil from the previous crop. This method minimizes soil disturbance and retains the organic matter on the soil surface. No-till or zero-till seeding is a key component of conservation agriculture, promoting sustainability and long-term soil productivity.

On-farm diversified uses: Uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, and uses that produce value-added agricultural products. Ground-mounted solar facilities are permitted in prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, only as on-farm diversified uses.⁴⁰

Provincial Location Quotient: The concentration of employed workers in a region relative to the provincial average. It can reveal what makes the region "unique" in comparison to the provincial average.

Primary agriculture: Encompasses agricultural production on farms, in nurseries, or in greenhouses.⁴¹

Prime agricultural land: This land includes:

- Speciality crop areas (e.g., the Holland Marsh), used to grow crops such as tender fruits, vegetables, grapes, carrots and onions
- Classes 1 to 3 lands according to the [Canada Land Inventory](#)⁴²

Provincial location quotient: The concentration of employed workers in a region relative to the provincial average. It can reveal what makes the region "unique" in comparison to the provincial average.

RTO6: RTO6 (Regional Tourism Organization 6) is one of the 13 regional tourism organizations in Ontario, Canada. Each RTO is responsible for promoting and developing tourism in specific geographic areas of the province.

SME: Small and medium-sized enterprises. These businesses have between one and 499 paid employees.⁴³

Specialty crop area: Areas designated using guidelines developed by the province, as amended from time to time. In these areas, specialty crops are predominantly grown such as tender fruits (peaches, cherries, plums), grapes, other fruit crops, vegetable crops, greenhouse crops, and

crops from agriculturally developed organic soil usually resulting from:

- a. Soils that have suitability to produce specialty crops, or lands that are subject to special climatic conditions, or a combination of both;
- b. Farmers skilled in the production of specialty crops; and
- c. A long-term investment of capital in areas such as crops, drainage, infrastructure and related facilities and services to produce, store, or process specialty crops.⁴⁴

Transition planning: The process through which a business, such as a farm operation, is transferred from one owner (or one group of owners) to another owner (or group of owners). For example, transition planning occurs to transfer ownership of a farm from one generation to the next. This type of planning is still sometimes referenced as succession planning.

Urban agriculture: Food production in urban and settlement areas for personal consumption, commercial sale, education or therapy. It includes gardening and livestock raised in backyards, container gardening on balconies or rooftops and community gardening.⁴⁵

Value added agri-food processing: Adds value to agri-food products through special production methods (e.g., organic, identity preserved) or processing (e.g., canning produce, making dairy products).⁴⁶

Vertical farming: The practice of growing crops in vertically stacked layers. It often incorporates [controlled-environment agriculture](#), which aims to optimize plant growth, and soilless farming techniques such as [hydroponics](#), [aquaponics](#) and [aeroponics](#).

York Region Food Collaborative: An internal York Region group that works together to help align, create and promote food-related programs across York Region's service areas.

²⁵ York Region. (n.d.) Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector.

²⁶ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. (July 2023). [Overview of Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector](#).

²⁷ Government of Ontario. [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#).

²⁸ York Region. (June 2023). York Region Official Plan 2022: Office Consolidation.

²⁹ Chen, Zong Jia and Jewitt, Allyson. (May 2023). [Canada's farms integrate renewable energy production and technologies toward a future of sustainable and efficient agriculture](#). And Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. (March 2024). [Biomass combustion](#).

³⁰ York Region. (June 2023). York Region Official Plan 2022: Office Consolidation.

³¹ Culinary Tourism Alliance. (2023). [What is Food Tourism?](#)

³² Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. (March 2024). [Agricultural best management practices](#).

³³ Statistics Canada. (2019). [Farm operator](#)

³⁴ York Region. (April 2024). [Food Insecurity in York Region: The 2023 Nutritious Food Basket Report](#).

³⁵ Statistics Canada. (Feb. 2024). [Farm Cash Receipts](#).

³⁶ Personal communication with Stephen Duff, Chief Economist, OMAFA.

³⁷ This revenue excludes "the sale of land and buildings, machinery, equipment, financial assets, and quota (capital gains), the value of inventory adjustments, [and] goods purchased for retail." Statistics Canada. (March 2023). [Farm Financial Survey – 2021](#).

³⁸ Statistics Canada. (March 2023). [Farm Financial Survey – 2021](#).

³⁹ Statistics Canada. (Nov. 2022). [Introduction to the North American Industry Classification System \(NAICS\) Canada 2017 Version 3.0](#).

⁴⁰ York Region. (June 2023). York Region Official Plan 2022: Office Consolidation.

⁴¹ Government of Canada. (Oct. 2023). [Hire a temporary foreign agricultural worker](#).

⁴² Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. (Feb. 2024). [Prime agricultural areas](#).

⁴³ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. (Jan. 2024). [Key Small Business Statistics 2022](#).

⁴⁴ York Region. (June 2023). York Region Official Plan 2022: Office Consolidation.

⁴⁵ York Region. (June 2023). York Region Official Plan 2022: Office Consolidation.

⁴⁶ Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. (July 2019). [Made in Canada: Growing Canada's Value-Added Food Sector](#).



York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food
yorklink.ca/agrifood | agri-food@york.ca

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request
Contact: agri-food@york.ca