

Open letter: Greens push Wayne to support local food processors

Dear editor:

Green Party of Ontario leader Mike Schreiner sent the following letter to Premier Wynne in regards to the government's lack of support for the Ontario's food processing sector:

Dear Premier Wynne;

Now is the time to take bold action to support Ontario's food processing sector.

The closure of the Heinz plant in Leamington and the Kellogg's plant in London have not only devastated two communities, they are also part of a growing trend of food plant closures that must be reversed.

During the recent recession, six major Ontario fruit and vegetable processing facilities closed. Studies estimate that these six closures cost Ontario 30,000 on-farm jobs and 8,700 food processing jobs. Over 43 per cent of small meat processors have also closed shop in the past decade.

These plant closures not only lead to direct job losses ? 740 full time and 350 seasonal in Leamington alone ? they also hurt Ontario farmers who lose markets for their products and consumers who want to eat healthy local food.

A strong food processing sector is essential to supporting local sustainable food systems and securing local food jobs. Ontario's food and beverage processors generate \$39.5 billion in revenue, create 125,000 jobs, and contribute \$11 billion to Ontario's GDP. The food and farming sector as a whole is Ontario's largest employer with more than 740,000 jobs that contribute more than \$34 billion to Ontario's economy.

The Ontario food and beverage processing sector has established an ambitious goal of creating an additional 60,000 jobs by 2020, generating over \$70 billion in revenues. Your challenge to the food and farming sector to create 120,000 new jobs by 2020 suggests you recognize the importance of the food and farming sector to Ontario's economy.

Yet, your government has failed to take bold action to reverse the loss of food processing jobs in Ontario. Premier, it is one thing to issue a challenge, it is quite another to have a plan and to take action yourself.

In the same way that the province supported the auto sector in 2008, it is time for the provincial government to support local food processors and farmers today.

The Green Party of Ontario is calling on the provincial government to establish a local food infrastructure fund of grants and loans to support Ontario businesses to invest in and operate local food processing facilities. 815 people have signed a petition supporting the Green Party's call to support Ontario food processors.

Farm families and businesses have contacted me to say that access to affordable capital is essential to securing homegrown investments in food processing facilities. Prospective companies and those looking to expand operations are not looking for handouts. Rather, they need government support to secure affordable loans and capital investments.

Premier, I appreciate your consideration of our request, and I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this matter in more detail. The time for action is now.

Mike Schreiner

Leader

Green Party of Ontario