THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE FOOD AND FARMING PLAN INVOLVES THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE BODY TO PROMOTE COLLABORATION BETWEEN SEVERAL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WITHIN A CITY REGION, AS WELL AS A RANGE OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WITH AN INTEREST IN THE FOOD AND FARMING ECONOMY — INCLUDING LARGE-SCALE FARMERS. IT UNDERLINES THE VALUE OF ESTABLISHING CLEAR TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEDIATION TOOLS, AND FORGING INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES TO MANAGE THE COMPLEXITIES OF FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING AT THE URBAN-RURAL INTERFACE.
The Golden Horseshoe geographical region stretches around the Western shores of Canada’s Lake Ontario, including the Greater Toronto Area and neighbouring cities, towns and rural communities. It is one of the most densely populated parts of North America, and an influx of educated, affluent professionals has led to rapid development and expansion of the cities.

Yet historically the Golden Horseshoe has been an important agricultural region; more than a million acres of productive farmland remain in the Greenbelt and in the shrinking peri-urban and rural spaces between the urban hubs. Agriculture and the dependent food and beverage processing industry make a significant contribution to the local economy — around CDN$12.3 billion a year (Walton, 2012a). A 2003 study in the Greater Toronto Area found that urbanization has caused dramatic changes to agricultural operations. Many farmers have switched from land-extensive operations to higher-value, intensively grown commodities like soft fruits, vegetables and flowers. As the farming community shrinks, so too does access to support services (Planscape, 2003). This places the future of the food and farming industries in the Golden Horseshoe in jeopardy — with serious implications both for the local economy and for long-term food security.

In 2011/12 seven municipalities of the Golden Horseshoe — the cities of Hamilton and Toronto, and the top-tier Municipal Regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, and York — adopted a common plan to help the food and farming sector remain viable in the face of land use pressures at the urban-rural interface, as well as other challenges such as infrastructure gaps, rising energy costs, and disjoined policy implementation.

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Plan 2021 (GHFFP) (Walton, 2012a) is a ten-year plan with five objectives:

- to grow the food and farming cluster;
- to link food, farming and health through consumer education;
- to foster innovation to enhance competitiveness and sustainability;
- to enable the cluster to be competitive and profitable by aligning policy tools; and
- to cultivate new approaches to supporting food and farming.

Implementation is overseen by the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance. The Alliance is a powerful voice in lobbying over food and farming matters in the region, as its membership includes representatives of all seven municipalities, provincial bodies, farm organizations, and other commercial, civil so-

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52. The core Golden Horseshoe area covers 10,097km², while the Greater Golden Horseshoe extends further inland and covers 33,500km².

53. E.g. piped water, natural gas, and three-phase power for running heavy machinery.

54. The five Municipal Regions are the top tier municipalities. Each is comprised of several second tier municipalities — cities, towns or townships. The Regions contain areas of urban, sub-urban and rural character to varying degrees.

55. The Alliance is not an incorporated body, but the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) acts as its agent in financial affairs, procurement and human resources. This means the Alliance has the benefit of professional approaches without having to hire administrative staff. Grant applications clearly convey that the Alliance is the applicant and TRCA is the agent.
ciety and research entities with an interest in the sector\(^56\).

This case study examines how the GHFFP was drawn up, and how the political engagement of seven municipal governments — spanning urban and rural areas — was secured. It demonstrates how, since the GHFFP has become the policy of these local governments, they contribute to implementation through programmes and projects they support. Moreover, the Alliance serves as a platform for harmonized implementation of Provincial policies, and enables collective lobbying of Ontario policy makers.

**ORIGINS OF THE GHFFP**

The GHFFP has its roots in an earlier plan, the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Plan (GTAAAP)\(^57\), which was launched in 2005 and applied to the City of Toronto and the surrounding cities, towns and rural areas within the Regions of Durham, Halton, Peel and York. The GTAAAP was instigated by farmers who were concerned that several new provincial land use policies considered protection of agricultural land from a planning perspective but did not address economic viability\(^58\). They were able to convince the leaders of the councils of Durham, Peel, Halton and York to fund studies on the state of agriculture in the region, paving the way for a wide-ranging Action Plan with ownership across the Greater Toronto Area\(^59\). By mid-2009 many of the actions in the GTAAAP were complete. It had become apparent that the City of Hamilton and the Region of Niagara faced similar issues relating to the rural-urban interface as Greater Toronto, and should be included in any follow-up plan and governance body.

**PREPARING THE PLAN**

In 2009 a meeting brought together members of the GTAAAC (including representatives of its five member municipalities and the GTA Agriculture Federations that represent farmers),

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56. The Alliance is made up of: an elected executive committee consisting of a chair and co- or vice-chair, treasurer, and executive members; representatives of the municipalities; a representative of Friends of the Greenbelt; a health sector representative; and 11 representatives from across the sector, including livestock production, processing, general farm organizations, food and farming education, and the Toronto Food Policy Council. Advisers from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Toronto Region Conservation Authority and the Regional Planning Commissioners also attend as non-voting advisers.

57. The GTAAAP sought to ensure the agricultural sector’s survival through actions relating to economic development, education and marketing, land use policy, and accountability and responsibility (GTA Federations of Agriculture & GTA Agricultural Working Group, 2005).


59. Under the banner of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Federations of Agriculture, the farmers approached the GTA Regional Chairs (the leaders of the councils of Durham, Peel, Halton and York) with their concerns. The Chairs, acknowledging that food and farming was still of significant economic importance in the areas, were receptive and provided funding for studies on the state of agriculture within the regions. The regions pooled these funds and, together with the City of Toronto, formed the GTA Agricultural Working Group and commissioned the *GTA Agricultural Profile Update* (Planscape, 2003), a snapshot report on the dire straits faced by the farming sector across Greater Toronto that informed the GTAAAP. The GTAAAP, funded by the federal Growing Forward programme, was published in 2005. It contained remedial actions under four pillars: economic development, education and marketing; land use policy; and accountability and responsibility (GTA Federations of Agriculture & GTA Agricultural Working Group, 2005). Implementation was overseen by the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAC). The steering group was made up of the Chair of GTAAC and the executive director of GTAAC, and representatives from: Halton Region Federation of Agriculture (as Chair); City of Hamilton; Toronto Food Policy Council; Friends of the Greenbelt; Holland Marsh Growers Association; Region of Niagara; Region of Durham.
municipal actors from the City of Hamilton and the largely rural Region of Niagara, Friends of the Greenbelt (a grant-making foundation), and the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors’ Alliance. Attendees acknowledged that the economic viability of agriculture is intrinsically connected to that of the wider food sector, including processors, food manufacturers and research and development centres. The follow-up plan would therefore take a food systems approach and respond to the broader economic development considerations of the whole food sector, not just farmers.

Funding to develop the new plan, to establish governance structures, and to draw up terms of reference, was obtained from the Friends of the Greenbelt60. The three-phase process — research, consultation and drafting of the plan — was supervised by an informal steering group of actors put together by the committee overseeing the previous plan, with representation from across the food system in Golden Horseshoe61.

In line with the broader scope, the steering group included economic development actors from the municipalities in addition to the planning professionals already involved in the previous plan. This was a challenge because the two professions have markedly different ways of working and use quite different language, even when essentially they share the same vision. As a result, the writing process was long and labour-intensive, requiring determined mediation by consultants from the land use planning consultancy Planscape to reach consensus wording.

I remember being in meetings where we would be agonising over how should we say things, so it means the same to everyone... those kinds of conversations were so common that at one point, I can remember some of the folks in the room were just ready to throw in the towel and say ‘enough! we’ve had enough!’ but I think in the end we were all happy that we stuck it out because it has guided our work so well.

Member of the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance

IMPLEMENTING THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE FOOD AND FARMING PLAN

The role of the Alliance is to provide political leadership and guidance for implementation of the GHFFP. The Alliance initiates some projects in partnership with other organizations (such as the Asset Mapping project described below), but its capacity is limited; its only employee is the executive director, Janet Horner, whose job is to coordinate activities and network. As a result, much of the implementation lies in the hands of member organizations, as it is aligned with and informs their work.

In particular, the municipalities within the Golden Horseshoe play a central role in implementation. The GHFFP was formally adopted by all seven municipalities following intense efforts by steering group members, which in-

60. Friends of the Greenbelt administers the Greenbelt Fund, which is supported by private and public sources — including in 2016 a $6 million, three-year funding commitment from Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

61. The steering group was made up of the Chair of GTAAAC (also from Peel Federation of Agriculture) and the executive director of GTAAAC, and representatives from: Halton Region Federation of Agriculture (as Chair); City of Hamilton; Toronto Food Policy Council; Friends of the Greenbelt; Holland Marsh Growers Association; Region of Niagara; Region of Durham.
involved submitting to each municipal council a version of the background report tailored to their circumstances and priorities, to find political champions, and to attend debates and votes. The GHFFP has now become the official policy of the municipalities, and as such is used to make the case for municipal programmes that will contribute to its objectives.

For example, in 2013 the City of Toronto’s Economic Development Committee adopted a motion to expand and relocate the Toronto Food Business Incubator (TFBI), noting that assisting food start-ups was in line with the objectives of the GHFFP (Williams, 2013). Similarly in 2016 the same committee voted to form a working group to advise on the barriers and opportunities for public food markets in Toronto and to develop a strategy, thereby linking urban demand with local food supply (Fragedakis, 2016).

In the City of Hamilton, meanwhile, there has been close, ongoing cooperation between the Alliance and the multi-departmental steering group that led development of Hamilton’s own Food Strategy, to ensure that it is in line with the GHFFP’s projects and goals. Alliance members are currently assisting Hamilton with two projects to enable local food procurement, one for long-term care facilities and the other for Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology.

And in the Region of Halton, Canada’s fastest developing region, the new Agricultural Strategy has been built around the same five objectives as the GHFFP and its integrated approach. For instance, Halton’s strategy recommends a number of actions to improve citizens’ food literacy under the pillar ‘Link Food, Farming and Health’.

The municipalities also aid implementation of the GHFFP by designating a representative (and a stand-in) to sit on the Alliance — either an elected official or an officer from the planning or economic development departments with a reporting relationship to their council. This promotes harmonized policy between the municipalities. For example, municipal representatives reported back to their councils on how their neighbours were interpreting Ontario land use policy, as some municipalities were favouring applications for farm buildings for value-adding activities while others blocked them.
posing a barrier to farm development. Moreover, through their representatives the municipal councils worked together on the Alliance’s submission to Ontario’s land use planning review for Greater Golden Horseshoe (Crombie, 2015). By working collectively and speaking with a common voice, they had a more powerful influence over provincial policy than they would have had individually. In another example, the zoning regulations developed by the City of Hamilton to promote urban agriculture are now being shared with other areas that are seeing increasing food growing activity.

Furthermore, the terms of reference of the Alliance require municipal representatives to participate in the working group that supervises Alliance-led projects. This provides human resources that otherwise would be sorely lacking, and the municipal actors take turns to serve as project managers.

**FUNDING MATTERS**

Core funding for the Alliance is provided by the municipalities, which each contribute CDN$30,000 per year. This is a relatively small sum for individual municipal budgets, but together the contributions enable the employment of the executive director and the part-funding of projects. The municipal funding goes into a common pot for the Alliance to administer according to need.

However one of the more urbanized municipalities has, in the past, placed conditions on its support, insisting that its funding be spent on projects of its choosing and in which its staff have a role. One interviewee attributed these conditions to the political leaders being city-based and lacking ‘passion’ for food and farming issues, even though the farmers in this municipality are outspoken.

62. The final report of this review included all the points raised in the submission and recommends a systems approach to supporting food and farming within the land use policy framework.
in their support and there is a long legacy of community-led food initiatives. Another attributed the constraints to the fact that this municipality’s financial contribution came out of a particular project budget rather than as a discrete line of expenditure under the Council budget. Either way, the requirements have complicated the smooth running of the Alliance, requiring the executive director to attend more meetings to ensure continuing commitment.

The core budget is supplemented by funds from other sources. Some money is provided by Friends of the Greenbelt, while additional project funding is sought from external partners.

The Alliance tends to carry out projects in stages so that it can point to initial results when pitching for funds for subsequent stages. For example, initial funding of CDN$20,000 for the Asset Mapping project was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) for the production of a data template. The next tranche of funding, from Agriculture and Agri-food Canada’s Growing Forward 2 programme, enabled standardized data requests that led to release of the first version of the platform, containing 17,000 data points, in late 2013. Based on these results, OMAFRA funded the platform’s expansion to 60,000 data points, which was released in August 2016.

ENSURING ATTENDANCE AND MANAGING CONFLICT

The Alliance meets five times a year and operates under robust terms of reference. Each organization appoints both a primary representative and deputy who can stand in for them if necessary. Moreover, if an individual is absent from three consecutive meetings the executive director will contact them or their organization to request a replacement. With a quorum required for votes to be valid, these mechanisms ensure that commitment to the Alliance does not wane, and that meetings are well attended.

Within the Alliance major ideological disagreements are rare. This is because many of its members were on the original steering group that developed the plan or were invited through personal networks and share the same vision for the long-term viability of agriculture.

However, some tension has occurred over conflicting economic development agendas. For example, the Alliance was unable to be a formal partner of the Durham campaign group ‘Land over Landing’, which opposes the construction of an airport on agricultural land. While the campaign’s aims of preserving land for farming are consistent with those of the Alliance, the remit of the economic development actor for Durham — who sits on the Alliance — covers all aspects of the local economy and it would have been politically

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63. Asset Mapping has been a major project to collect data on all the agri-food activities within the area including farms, food processors, industry suppliers and distributors, infrastructure, service centres, and the service industry. The data is collated into a web-based platform for planning and economic development professionals to use to analyze trends and identify changes over time.

64. OMAFRA enabled the Asset Mapping project practically as well as financially, by supporting the Alliance in negotiations with the Provincial government to gain access to ‘high security’ farm sale data. These data were crucial to building a comprehensive platform.
awkward for them to be seen to promote the economic interests of the food and farming sector over others. Other Alliance members understood the conflict and offered informal support to ‘Land over Landing’ instead, including suggesting that the airport be built on a smaller, lower grade plot of land.

A second area of conflict — between the Alliance and external organizations — concerns the place of large-scale commodity farming operations in the Golden Horseshoe, and in particular in Rouge Park, a 40km² area of parkland straddling the York-Durham border that is set to become Canada’s first urban national park. Some organizations hold that only small-scale, ecological agriculture is appropriate within a national park, but this vision would exclude many of the commodity farmers who currently lease land in the Rouge area — and who are members of bodies represented on the Alliance. The Alliance maintains that so-called ‘big agriculture’ must be involved in the conversation since it is an important economic driver. It advocates for incremental shifts of the policy framework — at the local, provincial and national levels — from exclusively facilitating export-oriented rotation cropping to encouraging a broader range of crop insurance options and support for domestic production and supply.

Even though the Food and Farming Alliance Action Plan has these sort of specific actions, my personal perspective is that it’s not just about checking things off on the list, [...] it’s more about the process of engagement, moving the bar forward, being opportunistic, and having ways of engaging multiple stakeholders in the conversation that’s important. [...] It’s about what happened in that work and the relationships that were developed to get there.

Member of the Toronto Food Policy Council and GHFFA

Holland March, one of two specialty crop areas in the Golden Horseshoe (Photo: GHFFA)
At the time of writing this tension remains unresolved, but merely getting actors with such conflicting viewpoints around the discussion table is regarded as an achievement in itself, since they rarely encounter each other face-to-face. Executive director Janet Horner has played a key role in mediated conversations; one interviewee credited her ability to give all points of view a fair hearing without being constrained by her own background in conventional agriculture.

Conversely, the main modus operandi of the Alliance, face-to-face meetings, has presented a barrier to the participation of some groups of actors. For example, no major food company is represented on the Alliance, because business executives cannot regularly take time out for meetings that are unrelated to daily business activities. However, the executive director has sought their involvement in special events on a one-off basis so that they still have some degree of engagement. For instance, executives from a large company took part in an advocacy day at the Ontario Legislative Building in Queen’s Park, Toronto, calling for greater support for small and medium-sized food businesses across the province. The presence of a corporation that makes a major contribution to Ontario’s economy lent weight to the Alliance’s message; while for the corporate representatives this was an exciting, new way of working that showed how diverse actors from across the food sector can join forces to address politicians with a common message.

**REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS**

The GHFFP and Implementation Plan are intended to be living documents that will be adjusted throughout the ten-year timeframe as requirements change. A ‘five year report card’ containing success stories form implementation to date is due to be published in late 2017. However, as the GHFFP was put in place without the development of indicators, the Alliance can check off completed tasks but cannot always measure the impacts for the food and farming sectors. Nonetheless, it is expected that the review exercise will yield insights that will lead to some adjustments.

**SUMMARY OF ENABLERS**

This case study has shown that a key enabler in developing the GHFFP was previous work between many of the actors which — together with a background report — highlighted areas where action was needed. The policy development process was inclusive and involved a major summit, while external consultants enabled consensus to be achieved between actors from different disciplinary backgrounds. The GHFFP is subject to periodic review and amendment to take account of lessons learned.

When it comes to delivery, the political commitment of the seven municipalities has been crucial, obtained by framing the proposal in terms of each one’s situation and political priorities. This makes the idea of taking action a powerful one, that it would be difficult for politicians to ignore. Political commitment has enabled supportive policies and programmes to be introduced by municipal governments, and there are strong channels of information and influence between the Alliance — located in a neutral space — and key power centres, since the municipal representatives each have a reporting relationship with their respective councils.

Significantly, political commitment is accompanied by funding, which in most cases can be used as the Alliance sees fit (to pay a staff member and for some projects), and human resources are provided by the municipal representatives serving as project managers. Budgetary constraints are overcome by seeking partners to co-fund projects.
The Alliance is a powerful entity in food- and farm-related policy because it has brought together a spectrum of respected actors and organizations, including seven municipalities, to speak with a collective voice. It plays an enabling role with respect of institutional structures, serving as a platform for resolving issues stemming from the division of policymaking powers and responsibilities between the province and municipalities. Conflict and ideological differences, where they occur, are generally handled through mediation; where no resolution to conflicting agendas or interests is possible, creative ways are found to achieve similar ends. The Alliance is an efficient and accountable governance body, as it has robust terms of reference to ensure members attend meetings — and therefore decisions can be taken.

### TABLE 4: KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLES

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| Farmers (mostly intensive, commodity farmers working under GTA Federations of Agriculture) | • Noticed exclusion of farming economy from Provincial strategies  
• Represented farmers’ interests to GTA Regional Chairs  
• Represented on Alliance |
| GTAAC                                                                  | • Implemented GTAAP  
• Formed initial steering group for GHFFP  
• Since creation of Alliance, holds topical discussion events |
| Initial steering group                                                 | • Carried out research for GTFFP development  
• Negotiated wording between members  
• Facilitated adoption by municipalities by framing GHFFP in terms of each one’s priorities |
| Planscape                                                             | • Consultants wrote draft GHFFP  
• Mediated between planners and economic developers over wording |
| Municipal councils                                                    | • Adopted GHFFP, provide funding  
• Provide representatives who serve as conduits for information and influence, and bring human capacity to working group |
| Executive director of Alliance                                        | • Paid employee of Alliance  
• Has legitimacy as leader; coordinates activities, mediates and builds relationships |
| Alliance                                                              | • Members’ contributions vary but collectively provide strategic guidance and make decisions |
| External project partners                                             | • Provide project funding, aid implementation |
| Large food manufacturers                                              | • Engage in advocacy events on one-off basis |
| Friends of the Greenbelt                                              | • Funds some projects, funded development of GHFFP and governance structures |
| OMAFRA Agriculture and Agri-food Canada                               | • Advisors  
• Funders of Asset Mapping project |