

# 3.0 FOOD PRODUCTION



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### 3.1 Findings

The following section will give an overview of agricultural production in Middlesex-London. This will help to build a more in-depth understanding of the local food system in the area and identify potential opportunities to strengthen it.

The objectives of this section are:

- To provide an overview of local agriculture in the area;
- To provide an account of sustainable or alternative food production; and
- To provide an account of activity in local and community-based food production, which includes smaller-scale, alternative or non-traditional forms of food production.

More specifically, this section looks at the number, type, and size of farms in Middlesex-London, as well as the major crops being grown on farms and how many farms are producing certified and transitional organic products. The number of operators on farms and the average age of operators, in addition to annual gross farm receipts and import/export data, serve to contextualize this information. Finally, an account of food production at the local and community level helps to determine if conventional (large-scale) agricultural production is being counterbalanced by alternative (small-scale) food system activity.

#### Farmland

The farmland area in Middlesex-London is 609,344 acres, making up 15.92% of Southern Ontario's total farmland (3,827,941 acres).<sup>58</sup> Southern Ontario includes Central Ontario, Eastern Ontario, Southwestern Ontario, and the Golden Horseshoe. The price per acre for this farmland (Table 10) has increased significantly over the past 5 years, by 33% in Middlesex County East and by 41% in Middlesex County West. As a result, it is becoming more difficult for new and existing farmers to increase their profitability through land purchase.

**Table 10: Price per Acre for Farmland in Middlesex-London, 2012-2014 (Source: RE/MAX Farm Report, 2014 and RE/MAX Market Trends, Farm Edition, 2012)**

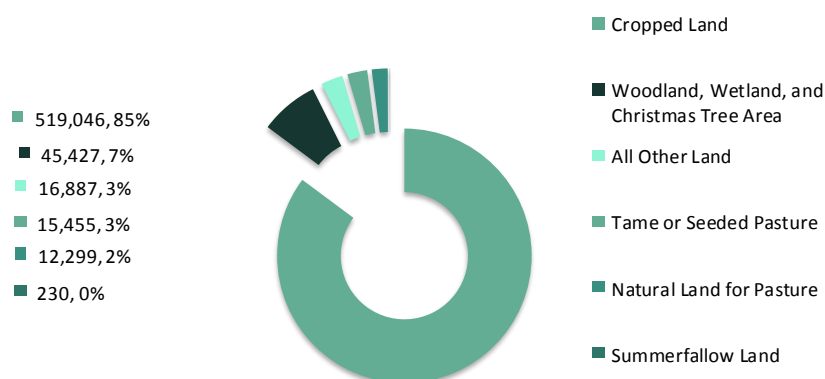
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Middlesex County East	\$8,000	\$9,000	\$10,500	\$12,000	\$12,000
Middlesex County West	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$7,500	\$12,000	\$8,500

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<sup>58</sup> Statistics Canada, "Land Use," *Census of Agriculture*, 2011.

Of the total farmland area in Middlesex-London, 85.18% (519,046 acres) is used as cropland (Figure 15). In addition, the total greenhouse space—the area under glass or plastic—in Middlesex-London is 80,065 square meters. This greenhouse space accounts for only a small percentage (0.64%) of the province’s total greenhouse space (12,549,007 sq/m), the majority of which, 84.45% or 10,722,671 sq/m, is located in Southern Ontario.<sup>59</sup> This suggests that farms in Middlesex-London are more closely tied to traditional farming methods than high-tech methods, such as growing hydroponic crops like tomatoes, cucumbers, and sweet peppers. This also means there may be an opportunity for further investigation into the expansion of greenhouse space in the area.

**Figure 15: Farmland in Middlesex-London by Use of Land in Acres, Percentage (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2011)**



### Farming and Farm Size

According to the 2011 Census of Agriculture, the total number of farms in Middlesex-London is 2,352. This is a 25.62% decrease in the number of farms since the 1991 census. This decrease corresponds to a provincial decline in the number of farms over the same period of time (24.31%).<sup>60</sup> With a recent increase in the price of farmland and a consistent decrease in the number of farms in the region, this suggests that consolidation of farmland is taking place. This movement towards less and bigger farms neither exists in isolation nor has gone unnoticed in the public domain. Paul Waldie explains, “the long-held image of Canadian farmers plowing small plots of land to eke out a meagre existence has been dashed by a new report (2011 Census of Agriculture) that reveals Canadian agriculture is rapidly consolidating and the size of family farms is growing at an unprecedented rate.”<sup>61</sup>

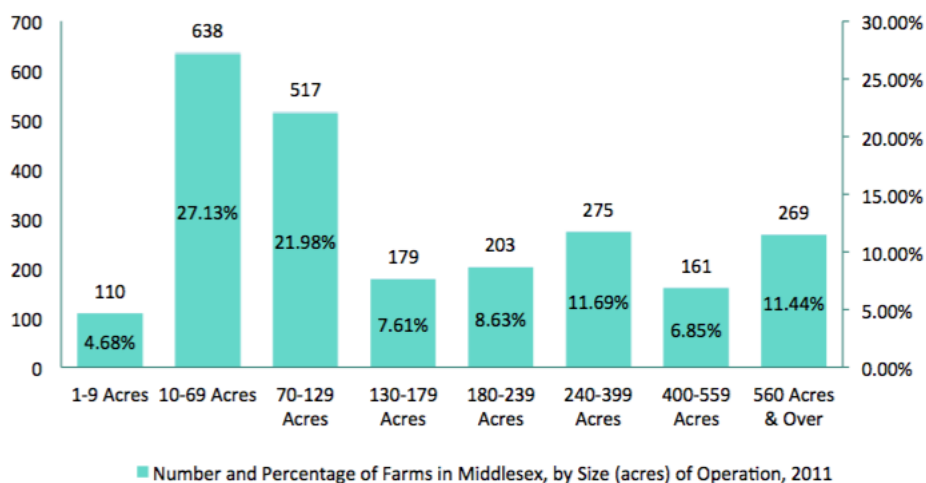
Looking more closely at the size (in acres) of farm operation in Middlesex-London, the findings show that in 2011 approximately half of the total number of farms (49.11%) are between 10-129 acres in size. Very few farms, 110 or 4.68%, are 1-9 acres while more than double the number of farms, 269 or 11.44%, fall into the largest category of 560 acres and over (Figure 16).

<sup>59</sup> Statistics Canada, “Greenhouse Area,” *Census of Agriculture, 2011*.

<sup>60</sup> Statistics Canada, “Number of Census Farms by County” *Censuses of Agriculture, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011*.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Waldie, “Family Farms are Fewer and Larger, StatsCan says,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 18, 2012.

**Figure 16: Number and Percentage of Farms in Middlesex-London, by Size (acres) of Operation (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2011)**



When compared to the number and size of farms in 2006 (Table 11) it can be seen that, on the one hand, there is a decrease in the total number of farms (6.85%). On the other hand, there is a significant increase (7%) in farms of 70-129 acres in size and a small increase (1.1%) in farms of 560 acres and over. The 1-9 acre and 130-179 acre farms saw the most significant decrease in number, by 22.5% and 26% respectively. What cannot be determined from this data is whether or not some of these small farms have been amalgamated into new larger farms, namely the 70-129 acre and 560 acres and over sized farms. However, in consideration of the increasing price of farmland (see above), and looking at both the types of farms in Middlesex-London (see below) and municipal policies that favour the expansion of farm parcels through the consolidation of farm plots (see 3.7.1), it can be reasonably assumed that some of the small farms have been consumed by larger farms producing crops for commodity markets.

**Table 11: Number of Farms in Middlesex-London, by Size (acres) of Operation, 2006 and 2011 (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2006, 2011)**

Year	1-9 Acres	10-69 Acres	70-129 Acres	130-179 Acres	180-239 Acres	240-399 Acres	400-559 Acres	560 Acres & Over	Total Farms
2006	142	676	510	242	220	306	163	266	2525
2011	110	638	517	179	203	275	161	269	2352
+/- %	-22.5	-5.6	7	-26	-7.7	-10.1	-1.2	1.1	-6.85

### Agricultural Production

The types of farms in Middlesex-London, broken down by industry (Figure 17) show that oilseed and grain farms far outnumber any other type of farming. This suggests that the cash cropping of commodities for an export market is the main priority and strength for farms in the area. The concentration of cash crops in the region is made further apparent when Middlesex-London is compared to other counties in Ontario that grow corn, soybeans, and wheat (Figures 18, 19, and 20). This is further evidenced below when considering total gross farm cash

receipts. With respect to other farming industries, such as beef cattle ranching, even though the total number of farms engaged in livestock farming make up a significant percentage of the region’s remaining farm types (21.8%), Middlesex-London’s percentages of the province’s total number of livestock (excluding poultry) are very small (Table 12).

Figure 17: Number of Farms in Middlesex-London by Industry (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2011)

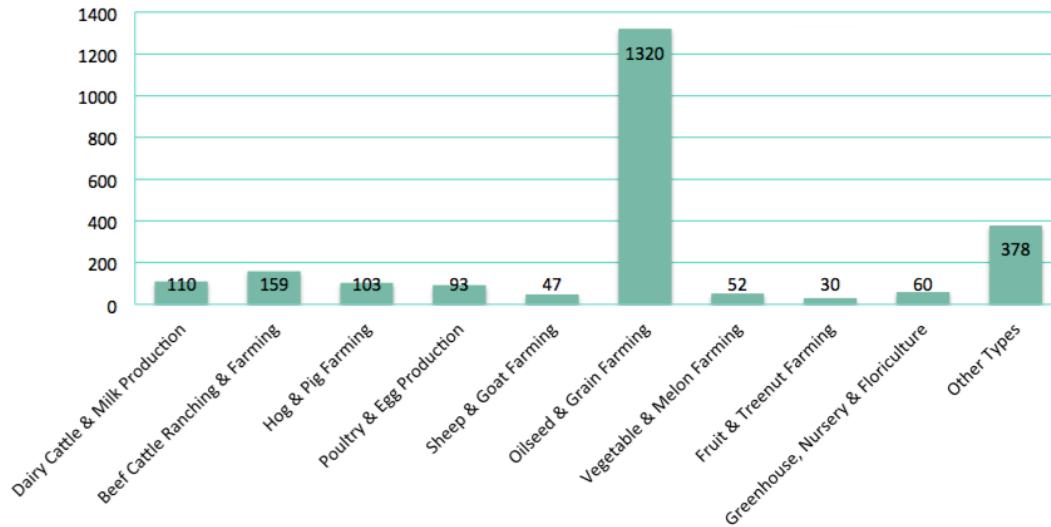
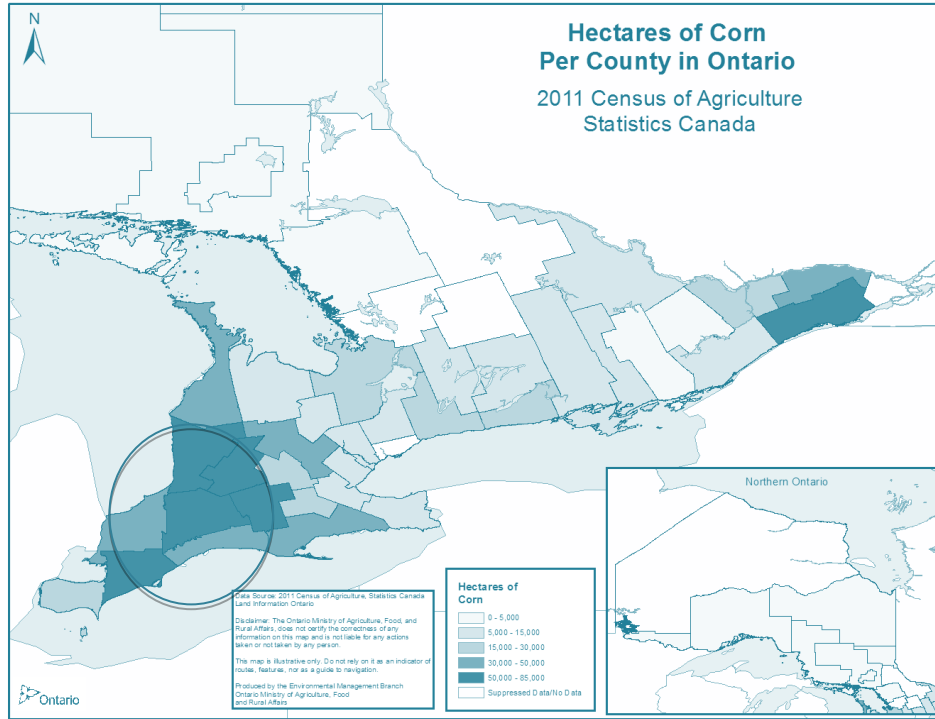


Table 12: Livestock in Middlesex-London and Ontario, by Number and Percentage, July 2014 (Source: Statistics Unit, OMAFRA, Statistics Canada)

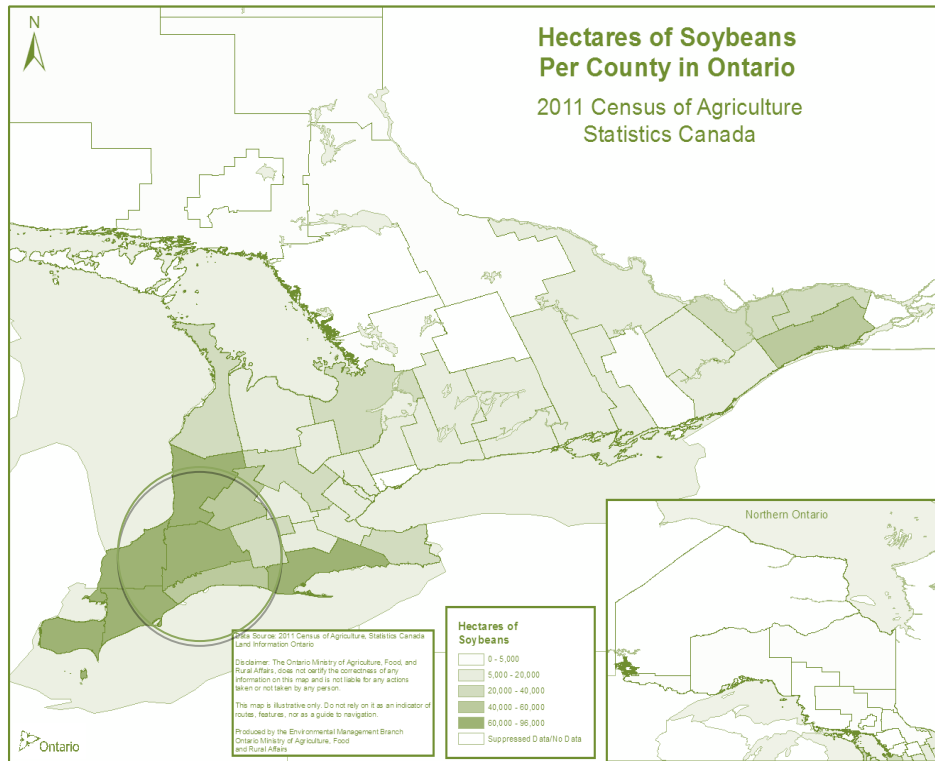
Livestock	Middlesex-London	Ontario	Percentage of Province
Cattle	58,171	17,593,000	0.33
Pigs	320,453	30,416,000	1.05
Sheep	12,852	3,355,000	0.38

When comparing the hectares dedicated to corn, soybean, and wheat, to the major field, fruit, and vegetable crops (by hectares) grown in Middlesex-London (Table 13), the total hectares dedicated to the major fruit and vegetable crops are minimal. However, in relation to the total land in Ontario dedicated to growing these fruit and vegetable crops, it is important to note that Middlesex-London controls high percentages of the total land dedicated to the production of green peas (32.11%), sweet corn (14.99%), and green or wax beans (20.8%) (Table 13).

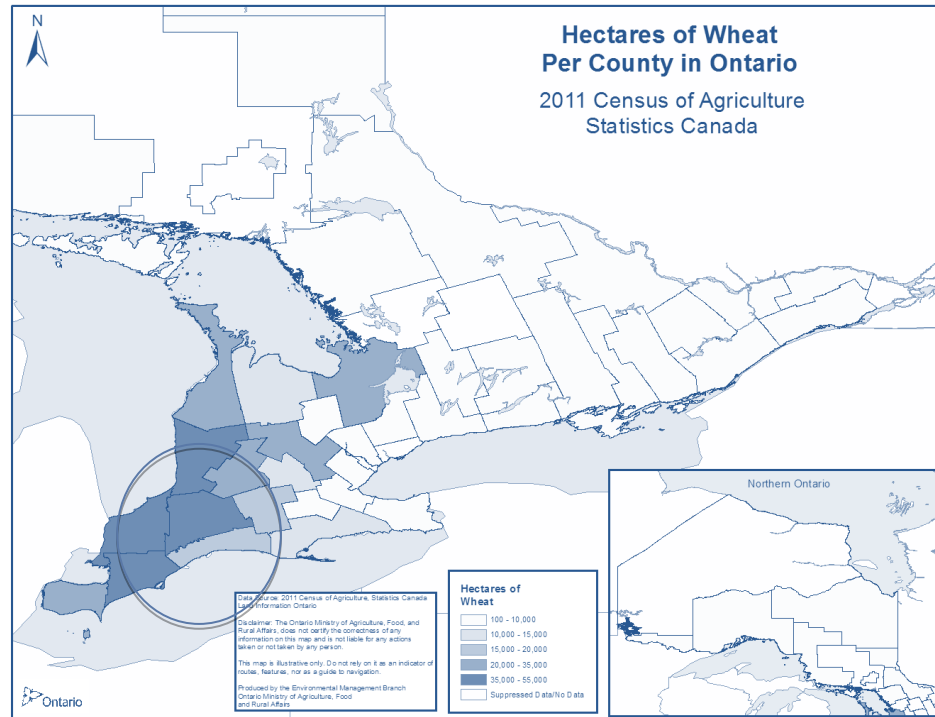
**Figure 18: Hectares of Corn per County in Ontario, 2011 (Source: Statistics Unit, Census of Agriculture Maps, 2011)**



**Figure 19: Hectares of Soybeans per County in Ontario, 2011 (Source: Statistics Unit, Census of Agriculture Maps, 2011)**



**Figure 20: Hectares of Wheat per County in Ontario, 2011 (Source: Statistics Unit, Census of Agriculture Maps, 2011)**



**Table 13: Major (hectares) Field Crops, Fruit Crops, and Vegetable Crops in Middlesex-London, Compared to Ontario (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2011)**

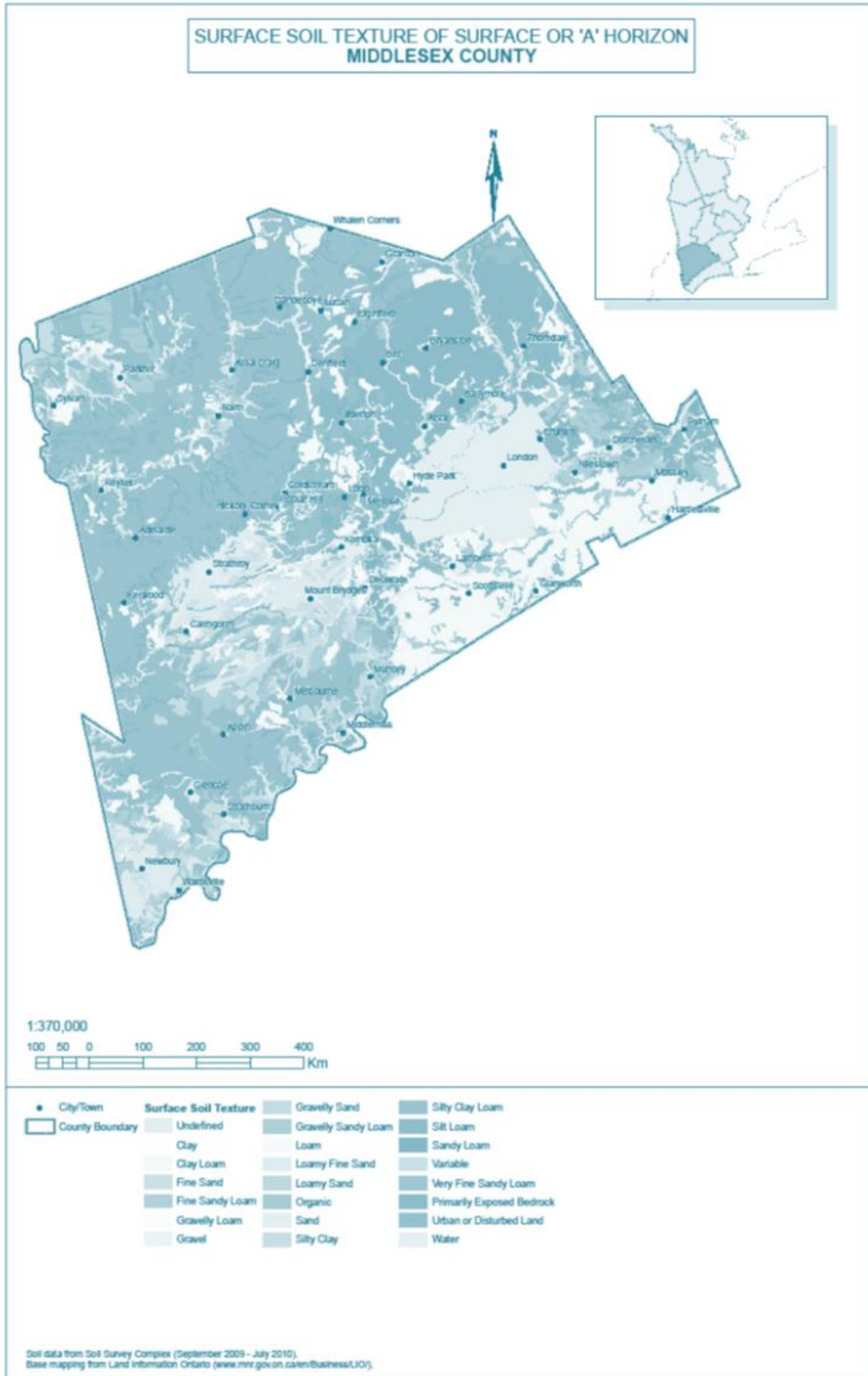
Major Crops, 2011	Middlesex-London	Ontario	% Province
<b>Field Crops</b>			
Corn for Grain	71,424	822,465	8.68
Soybeans	66,556	997,497	6.67
Winter Wheat	39,804	445,155	8.94
Hay	13,660	840,901	1.62
Corn for Silage	4,690	109,953	4.27
<b>Fruit Crops</b>			
Apples	237	6406	3.70
Strawberries	41	1,329	3.09
Raspberries	11	365	3.01
Peaches	6	2,612	0.23
Sour Cherries	0	948	0.00
<b>Vegetable Crops</b>			
Green Peas	1,965	6,119	32.11
Sweet Corn	1,549	10,336	14.99
Green or Wax Beans	773	3,717	20.80
Tomatoes	40	6,701	0.60

This confirms that Middlesex-London currently specializes in growing specific vegetable crops but, more importantly, it suggests that there may be an opportunity for the area to specialize in crops that grow in similar soil conditions. The surface soil textures in Middlesex-London (Figure 21) show that silty clay loam and silt loam cover most of the area, in addition bands of clay loam and pockets of loamy fine sand, fine sandy loam, and fine sand. Complementary data on the physical and climatic capability of the land in Middlesex-London (Figure 22) shows there are some “moderately severe” limitations on using land with loamy fine sand, fine sandy loam, and fine sand, for crops; however, the majority of land has only moderate limitations on its use for crops because it is covered in silty clay loam.

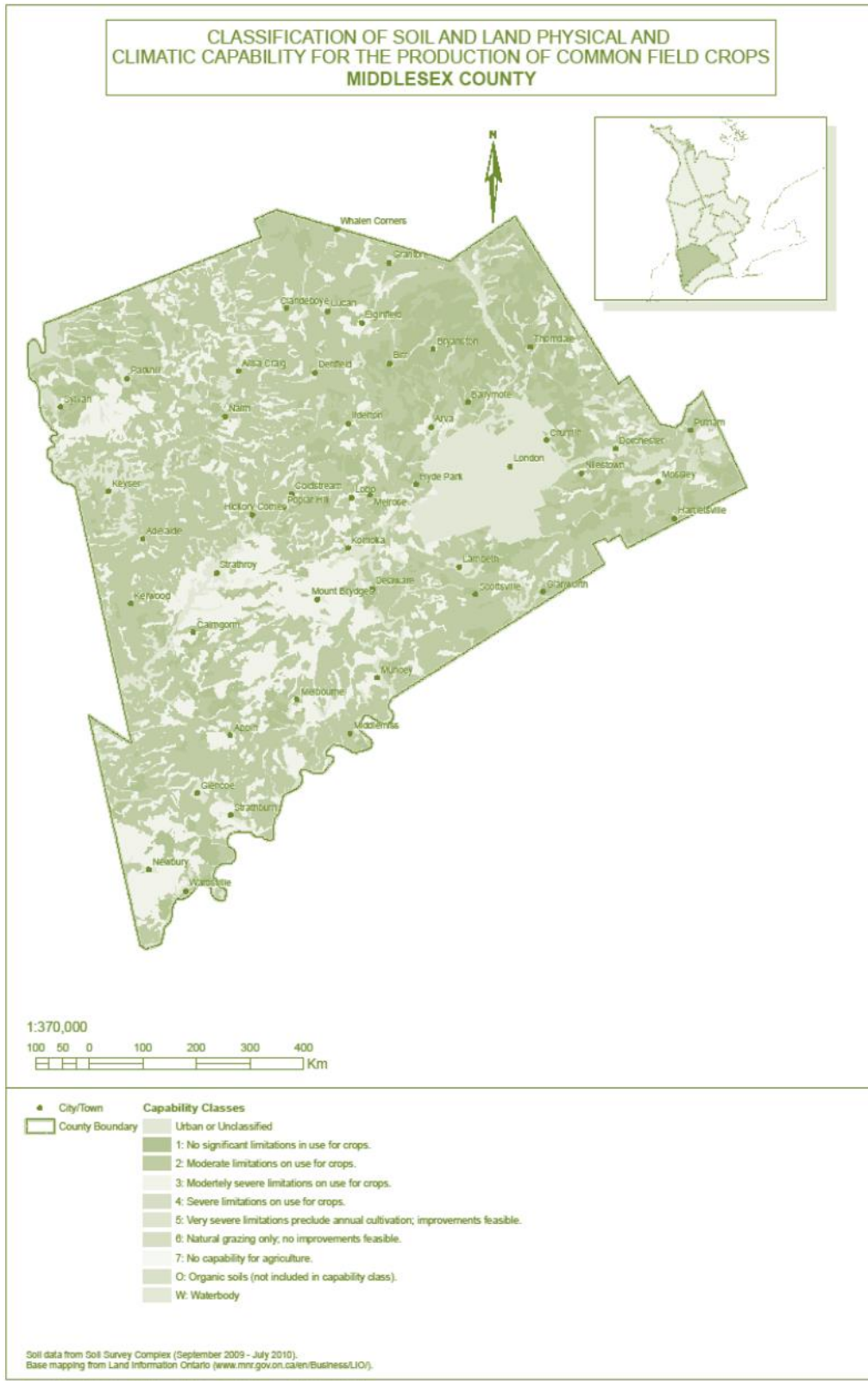
Furthermore, there are areas, namely those covered in silt loam, that have no significant limitations in use for crops. These findings lend themselves to further research into new crops that Middlesex-London can specialize in, as well as the opportunity to work on a future regional crop diversification strategy that could help to offset the importation of crops into the area that could easily grow there.



Figure 21: Surface Soil Texture in Middlesex-London (Source: Land Information Ontario, Soil Survey Complex, September 2009 – July 2010)



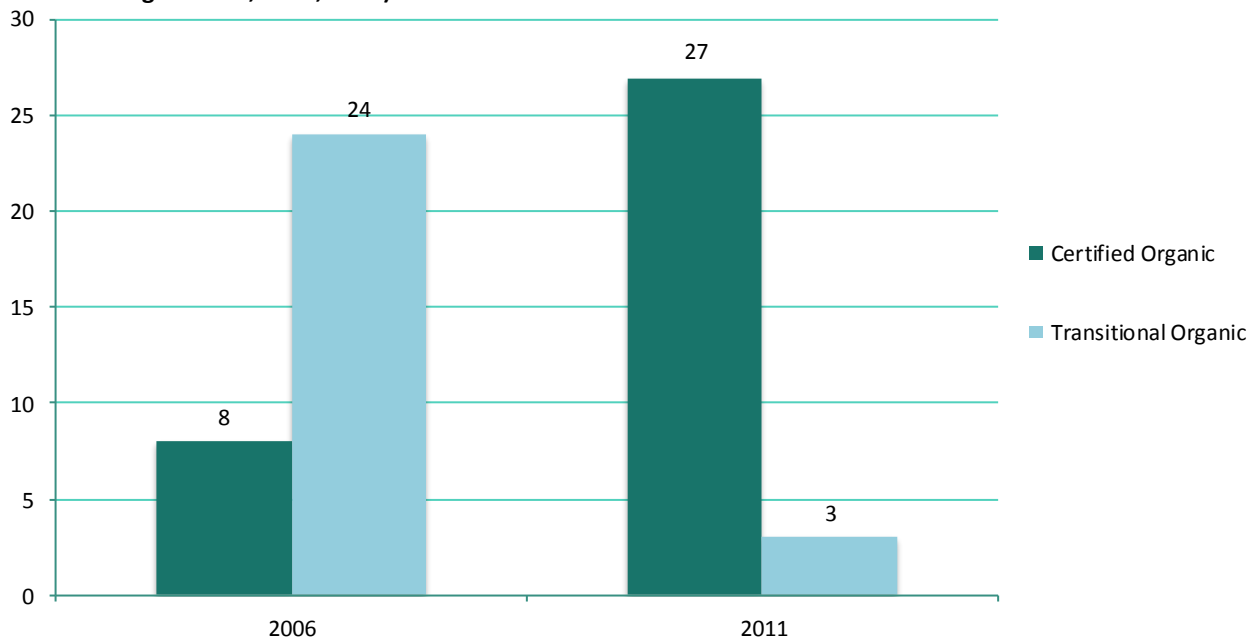
**Figure 22: Classification of Soil and Land, Physical and Climatic Capability for the Production of Common Field Crops, Middlesex-London (Source: Land Information Ontario, Soil Survey Complex, September 2009 – July 2010)**



## Sustainable Agricultural Production

Of the total number of Middlesex-London farms in 2011, 29 reported organic products for sale, with 27 reporting certified organic products for sale and 3 reporting transitional organic products (products moving through the process of becoming certified organic) for sale (Figure 23). As a whole, these 29 farms make up only 1.2% of the total farms in the area. When compared to the number of farms in the area reporting certified and transitional organic production in 2006 (32), it can be seen that many farms (19) have transitioned to become certified organic in 2011, but the number of new farms transitioning to become organic has decreased 87.5%, from 24 to 3 farms.

**Figure 23: Farms in Middlesex-London Reporting Certified Organic and Transitional Organic Production (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2011, 2006)**



While this indicates that *organic* farming is losing traction in the region, Middlesex-London farms may be practicing other sustainable farming methods. In fact, several farms were identified in the region as being best practices for sustainable agricultural operation, using water conservation, energy conservation, and waste reduction and disposal as criteria.<sup>62</sup> These farms include: Heeman’s Strawberry Farm in London; The Flower Ranch in Strathroy; Whitecrest Mushrooms in Putnam; and Sand Plains Aquaculture in Mossley. An analysis of environmental farm plans in place in Middlesex-London provides further insight into sustainable agricultural production activity in the region.

The Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan Program (EFP)—developed by an Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition, consisting of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Christian Farmers

<sup>62</sup> Shaun Anthony, “Sustainable Agricultural Practices for Middlesex County,” Community Futures Development Corporation of Middlesex County, April 2013.

Federation of Ontario, and Farm & Food Care Ontario—is delivered in Ontario by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, with the support of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). This program supports farms by increasing their environmental awareness and activity in up to 23 different areas on their farm (Table 9). Interestingly, none of the 23 EFP action areas are social in nature. While on-farm environmental considerations are an important part of any sustainable production efforts, a full sustainability plan might include social aspects as well. In addition, baseline assessments, benchmarking and evaluation may be components that could improve the tracking of progress in the adoption of environmental actions and sustainable farming methods.<sup>63</sup>

**Table 9: Environmental Farm Plan Action Areas (Source: Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, Environmental Farm Plan Infosheets, 2015, [www.ontariosoilcrop.org](http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org))**

Soil and Site Evaluation	Disposal of Livestock Mortalities	Use and Management of Manure and Other Organic and/or Prescribed Materials
Water Wells	Storage and Feeding of Ensilage	Horticultural Production
Pesticide Handling and Storage	Milking Centre Washwater	Field Crop Management
Fertilizer Storage and Handling	Nuisances and Normal Farming Practices	Pest Management
Storage of Petroleum Products	Water Efficiency	Stream, Ditch and Floodplain Management
Disposal of Farm Wastes	Energy Efficiency	Wetlands and Wildlife Ponds
Treatment of Household Wastewater	Soil Management	Woodlands and Wildlife
On-farm Storage, Treatment and Management of Manure and Other Prescribed Materials	Nutrient Management in Growing Crops	

A snapshot of Middlesex-London farmer participation in each of the steps associated with EFPs follows below (Table 10). Of the 2352 total farms in the area, 603 (26%) submitted EFP action plans for review. This indicates a strong interest by farmers in Middlesex-London to integrate sound environmental management practices into their farming operation. However, it also

<sup>63</sup> The first step involves attending a local EFP workshop and then completing a risk assessment that highlights environmental strengths on each farm as well as areas of concern. The risk assessment is completed using a workbook that contains 23 worksheets, with an average of 20 questions, which help to rate different situations on each farm. Once the risk assessment is complete, each participant develops an action plan that corresponds to the ratings from their risk assessment. This is followed by Step 2, submitting the action plan for review by a committee that is comprised of local farmers who have experience in sustainable farming. Step 3, the final step, involves participants implementing their action plan, which is based on the farms priorities, with technical assistance from OMAFRA. Federal-Territorial-Provincial cost-sharing programs—through the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative, Growing Forward 2, and the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program—are available for environmental improvement projects that are associated with implementing EFP action plans.

sheds light on the fact that almost 75% of farmers in the area have not yet expressed a public commitment to adopt more sustainable farming practices.

**Table 10: Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plans, April 18, 2005 – March 31, 2013 (Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association)**

County	Number of Workshops Attended	Number of Participants	Number of Workbooks Completed	Number of Reviews Completed
Middlesex	37	654	663	603
Ontario	1,348	17,578	16,929	13,702

Of the farmers who completed EFP action plans between April 2005 and March 2013, 1,525 applied to complementary cost-sharing programs to claim a portion of the costs associated with implementing their action plan (Table 11). The Federal-Territorial-Provincial cost-sharing programs associated with this timeline include: The Canadian-Ontario Farm Stewardship Program [COFSP], Greencover Canada [GC], and the Canadian-Ontario Water Supply Expansion Program [COWSEP] from 2005-2008; COFSP, GC, and COWSEP, from 2008-2009; and COFSP from 2009-2013, GC and COWSEP did not continue beyond March 31, 2009. Interestingly, the total sum of all claims paid out to these farmers (\$5,728,532) is only 28% of the gross project cost, which means the remaining funds needed to come from somewhere else (Table 11).

**Table 11: Environmental Improvement Projects Completed through Cost-Share Programs associated with Environmental Farm Plans, April 1, 2005 – March 31, 2013 (Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association)**

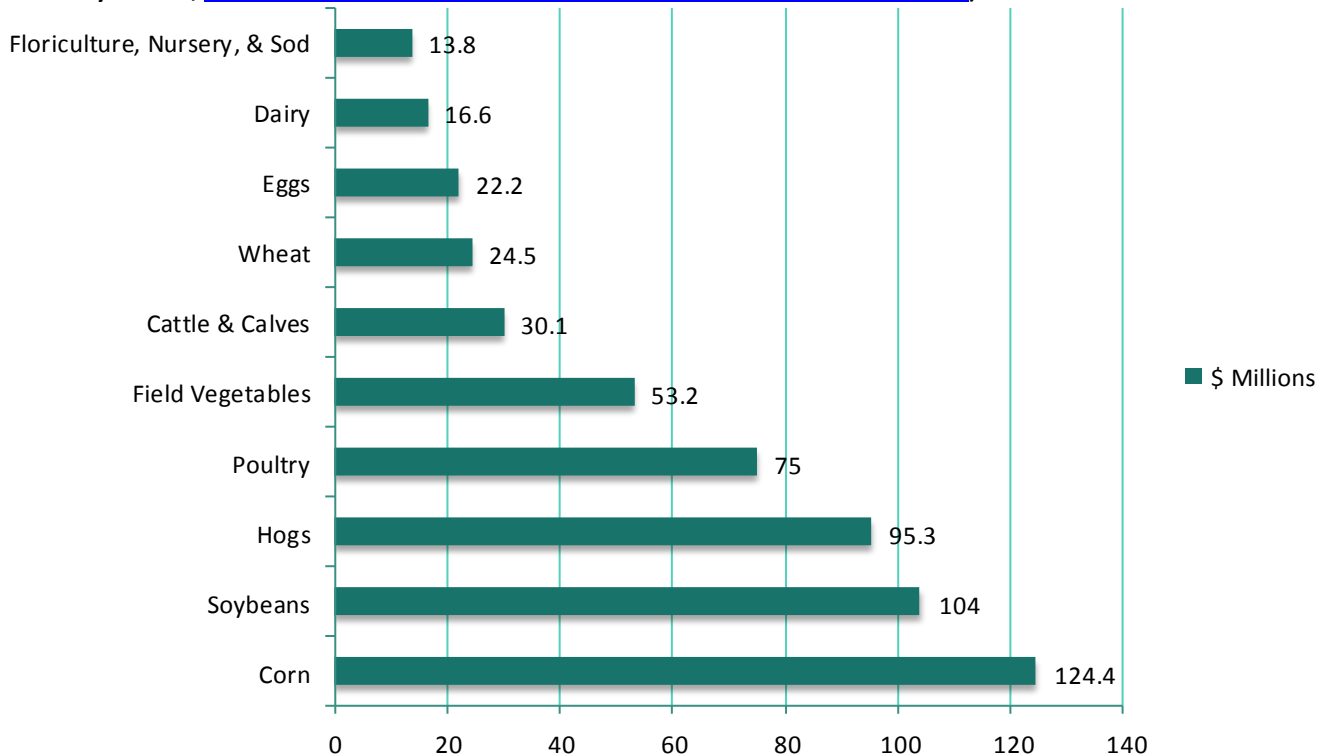
County	Number of Claims Paid	Total Sum of Claims Paid	Gross Project Cost
Middlesex	1,525	\$5,728,532	\$20,412,929
Ontario	23,760	\$100,565,713	\$361,424,234

### Farm Cash Receipts

Farm cash receipts for the major commodities in Middlesex-London (Figure 24) total \$604.3 million. Not surprisingly, with the number of farms and amount of land dedicated to oilseed and grain farming, the greatest contributor to farm cash receipts in 2013 was corn production, at \$124.4 million (representing 21% of total receipts). Combined with the other leading commodities, “the total cash receipts for corn, soybeans, hogs and poultry [\$398.7 million] represent almost 60% of the value of agriculture production in the County of Middlesex.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> County of Middlesex, *Agri-Food Economic Impact Report*, March 2015, Print, at p. 20.

**Figure 24: Farm Cash Receipts for Major Commodities in Middlesex-London, 2013 (Source: OMAFRA, Strategic Policy Branch, [http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/stats/county/southern\\_ontario.pdf](http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/stats/county/southern_ontario.pdf))**



A comparative breakdown of the number of farms contributing to annual gross farm receipts in Middlesex-London from 2006 and 2011 (Table 17), shows a definite trend towards consolidation in the area; that is, the number of farms in all categories below \$1,000,000 decreased by 214 farms (8.82%) while the number of farms in the largest two categories (\$1,000,000 and \$2,000,000 and over) grew by 41 farms (29.5%). This is a net loss of 173 farms in Middlesex-London from 2006 to 2011. This suggests that a small number of the small-to-medium size farms successfully scaled-up their operations while the majority (173) went out of business or sold their land

**Table 17: Total Gross Farm Receipts, by Number of Farms, in Middlesex-London, Compared to Ontario (Source: Census of Agriculture, 2006, 2011)**

Total Gross Farm Receipts	2006		% Province	2011		% Province
	Middlesex-London	Ontario		Middlesex-London	Ontario	
Under \$10,000	407	14,500	2.81	299	12263	2.44
\$10,000 - \$24,999	460	10,828	4.25	413	9098	4.54
\$25,000 - \$49,999	370	7,397	5.00	364	6720	5.42
\$50,000 - \$99,999	328	6,521	5.03	325	6189	5.25
\$100,000 - \$249,999	403	7,965	5.06	374	6985	5.35

Total Gross Farm Receipts	2006		% Province	2011		% Province
	Middlesex-London	Ontario		Middlesex-London	Ontario	
\$250,000 - \$499,999	277	5,589	4.96	244	5086	4.80
\$500,000 – \$999,999	182	2,745	6.63	194	3248	5.97
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>2,427</b>	<b>55,545</b>	<b>4.37</b>	<b>2,213</b>	<b>49,589</b>	<b>4.46</b>
\$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999	98	1,666	5.88	101	1558	6.48
\$2,000,000 and Over				38	803	4.73
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,525</b>	<b>57,211</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>2,352</b>	<b>51,950</b>	<b>4.53</b>

### Farm Operators

The total number of operators on farms in Middlesex-London is 3,405, of which 2,070 operators are from farms with two or more operators, and 1,335 operators are from farms with one operator.<sup>65</sup> The average age of these operators has increased over time, which is consistent with an increase in the average age of operators across the province (Figure 25). This means that succession planning is very important for the future of the agricultural industry in Middlesex-London. It also points to an invaluable resource, namely, farming knowledge and experience. New and young entrants coming into the farming industry can benefit greatly from an existing agricultural knowledge base if mechanisms for learning and knowledge transfer are set-up in time.

**Figure 25: Average Age of Farm Operators in Middlesex-London, Compared to Ontario (Source: Census' of Agriculture, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011)**



<sup>65</sup> Statistics Canada, “Number of Census Farms and Number of Operators, by County,” *Census of Agriculture*, 2011.

## Food Imports and Exports

Provincial food import and export data help to contextualize the current state of Middlesex-London's food production. In 2014, the province imported over \$23.4 billion in food while it exported just under \$12.5 billion (Figure 26). The positive socio-economic and environmental impacts of replacing some of the food imported cannot be understated. According to the *Dollars & Sense* report:

Over 50% of the \$20 billion in imported food products can be produced in Ontario...[and] if Ontario production expanded to replace 10% of the top fruit and vegetable imports, the Ontario economy could benefit by nearly an additional quarter of a billion dollars in GDP and 3,400 more FTE jobs. As well, with fewer imports, transportation requirements to ship food from out-of-province supply sources also decrease, reducing the environmental impact of the food system.<sup>66</sup>

According to data on agri-food trade by commodity group, the leading commodities exported over the last 10 years, and still at the top of exports in 2014, are grain and grain products and oilseed and oilseed products, all commodities that Middlesex-London specializes in. The leading commodities imported into the province over the last 10 years, and still at the top of imports in 2014, are fruit, nuts and vegetables.<sup>67</sup> This confirms that Middlesex-London's farmland and primary food production is tied closely to both commodity markets and the export trade. Based on the way the food system is currently organized, this means the ability for the area's local food system to meet the demand for other key commodities, such as fruit, nuts and vegetables, is very low. However, as noted above, based on the surface soil textures and the physical and climatic capability of the land in Middlesex-London, the natural conditions do not limit farms from diversifying their crop production in a concerted effort to substitute imports from out-of-Province or out-of-Country.

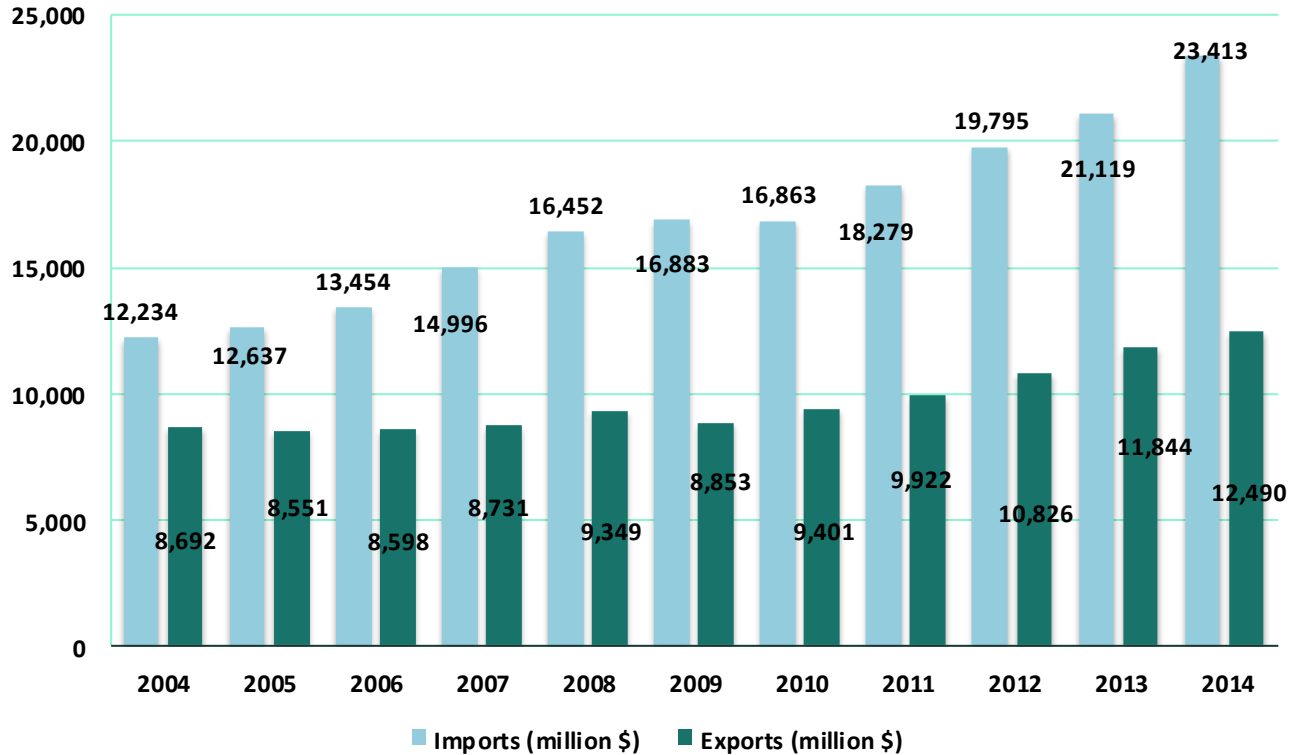
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<sup>66</sup> Atif A. Kubursi et al, *Dollars & Sense: Opportunities to Strengthen Southern Ontario's Food System*, Greenbelt Fund, The J.W. McConnell Foundation, and Metcalf Foundation, January 2015, Print, at p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, "Ontario Agri-Food Trade by Commodity Group, 2004-2014," Adapted from Statistics Canada, International Trade Statistics, March 2015.



Figure 26: Ontario Food Import/Exports, 2004-2014 (Source: Ontario Agri-Food Trade by Commodity Group, 2004-2014 Statistics Canada, International Trade Statistics)



### Local and Community-based Food Production

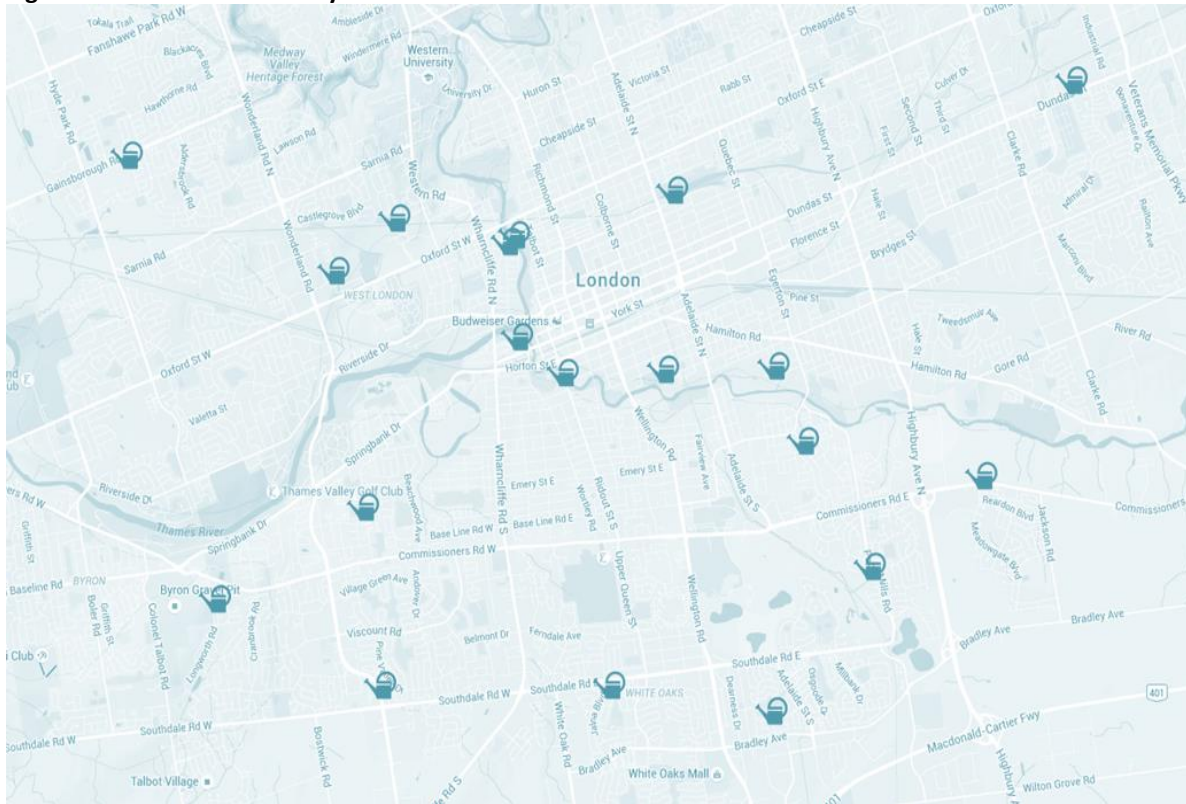
Community gardens are a positive indicator of local and community-based alternative food activity. They not only contribute to food security from a production standpoint but they also bring people together—often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—to learn about, grow, and access fresh and healthy food. There are 19 community gardens that span across the city of London (Figure 27), with a total of 528 plots (Table 18). Of the total available plots, “468 community garden plots were rented in London in 2014, [and] 50.9% of households renting a plot had a household income of \$24,000 or less.”<sup>68</sup> The fact that 94% of the community garden plots are rented suggests a very high degree of utilization.

In addition to these community gardens, school gardens bring the production of food into the classroom through empowering children with the knowledge of where their food comes from, how it is grown, and how to prepare it. The Thames Valley District School Board has 15 schools that have gardens and/or planter boxes on site. Within the London District Catholic School Board, the Urban Garden Project at John Paul II Secondary Catholic School (partially funded and supported by the Ontario Student Nutrition Program London-Middlesex) is a great example of how an outdoor learning space has been developed to teach students about sustainable

<sup>68</sup> London Poverty Research Centre, *A Guide to Current and Emerging Practices in Food Security*, 2014, Print, at p. 28.

agriculture while providing healthy breakfasts, 3 times per week, to approximately 250 students.<sup>69</sup>

**Figure 27: London Community Garden Locations**



**Table 18: Total Number of London Community Gardens, with Number of Plots (Source: London Community Resource Centre: <http://lrcr.on.ca/services/garden-locations>)**

Name of Garden	Number of Plots	Address
Anne Street Garden	28	20 Ann Street London, ON N6A 1P9
Berkshire Community Garden	48	510 Berkshire Drive London, ON N6J 3S1
Blackfriars Community Garden	22	2 St Patrick Street London, ON N6H 1P3
Carling Heights Community Garden	36	652 Elizabeth Street London, ON N5Y 4T7
Church of the Ascension	10	2060 Dundas Street London, ON N5V 1R2
Glen Cairn Community	8	410 Scenic Drive

<sup>69</sup> Investing in Children, “The Urban Garden Project: A First-of-Its-Kind Outdoor Learning Space,” June 24 2015, Web, at <http://investinginchildren.on.ca/blog/2015/6/24/the-urban-garden-project>.

Name of Garden	Number of Plots	Address
Garden		London, ON N5Z 3A8
Dillabough Garden	24	58 Dillabough Street London, ON N5Z 2B8
Meadowlily Garden	24	1610 Commissioners Road East London, ON N6M 1E8
Meredith Community Garden	17	419 South Street London, ON N6B 1C1
Nicholas Wilson Garden	15	16 Fitzroy Place London, ON N6E 1J1
Pond Mills Garden	20	451 Pond Mills Road London, ON N5Z 4Z3
Proudfoot Garden	40	693 Proudfoot Lane London, ON N6H 4Y7
Reservoir Garden	56	552 Crestwood Drive London, ON N6K 1Y1
Riverforks Garden	42	17 Becher Street London, ON N6C 1A4
Thames Garden	45	25 Ridout Street South London, ON N6C 3W6
University Heights Garden	14	290 Trott Drive London, ON N6G 1B5
Westview Garden	30	1000 Wonderland Road South London, ON N6J 4M1
West Park Community Garden	32	955 Gainsborough Road London, ON N6G 5C9
White Oaks Garden	17	1901 Jalna Boulevard London, ON N6E 3V9
<b>Total: 19</b>	<b>528</b>	

### 3.2 Gaps in Knowledge

A significant amount of information on food production in Middlesex-London was captured; however, a few pieces of data were not available at the time of this project. One example is the number of on-farm sustainable agricultural policies. While information on the number of farms participating in Environmental Farm Plans (EFP) was available the specific goals and measures used and implemented is unknown and there is no way of currently tracking progress. Having an EFP is a good start but more information will need to be collected in order to assess real progress. In addition, quantitative information on independent farm policies and practices was not available.

Next, the amount or proportion of food being sold locally versus the amount of food being sold into the wider system—Provincially and beyond—was unavailable. This data would require standardized tracking and tracing of local food sales and procurement both across and in between markets, which is not a current or standardized practice in Ontario.

Finally, while the findings suggest that diversifying crops in the area may be an opportunity for change, there was insufficient evidence on soil and climatic conditions for building a case for identifying specific crops to specialize in.

### **3.3 Strengths and Assets**

Middlesex-London has a significant number of assets that are unique to food production. The most notable ones are living assets; that is, assets related to what is grown in the area and its natural environment. During the community engagement process, members noted that Southwestern Ontario is one of the world's most robust and lush agricultural areas—with a climate that is conducive to growing a number of things—and Middlesex-London is located right in the centre of this region. The high quality of rural agricultural land and soil is one of the reasons the area has a significant amount of farmland, of which a high percentage (85%) is used as cropland.

While Middlesex-London is a major crop producer of commodity corn—an asset because it means high farm cash receipts—the area also specializes in green pea, sweet corn, and green and wax beans. In fact, Middlesex-London controls high percentages of the Province's production of these crops. More than half of the farms (54%) located in the area are small-to-medium in size, being between 1-129 acres. As such, these 1265 farms need to be considered as assets in and of themselves.

Another living asset related to alternative food production is the high number of community gardens, which have most of their plots rented. A cultural and spiritual asset identified by key stakeholders, which complements the number of community gardens, is the strong community garden network and a high interest in community gardening. A developing social asset, the strong community shared agricultural model that is starting to flourish in the area, provides further evidence of the interest in and support for local and alternative food production.

Finally, the age of farm operators is increasing across Middlesex-London, similar to the Province; however, this can be seen as an intellectual asset because of the pool of farm knowledge that they possess, which can be passed along to younger generations through mentorship and knowledge sharing programs.

The table below (Table 19) lists all of the strengths and assets identified through the community food assessment process that pertain to this section of the report (please see 1.2 for Asset Legend).

**Table 19: Strengths and Assets within Food Production**

FOOD PRODUCTION						
						
6. Significant amount of farmland (high percentage [85%] used as cropland)						
7. Significant acreage dedicated to oilseed and grain production						
8. High number of community gardens (most plots are rented)						
9. School gardens						
10. High quality rural agricultural land/soil						
11. Climate (conducive to growing a variety of things)						
12. Community and residential greenhouses						
13. Roof top gardens and apiaries						
14. Sandplains aquaculture						
15. London's Carolinian Food Forest						
16. Food forests						
17. Southwestern Ontario is one of the world's most robust and lush agricultural areas						
						
18. Small farms (more than half of farms [54%] are small-to-medium sized 1-129 acres)						
19. Vacant land						
						
20. Farming knowledge that can be passed down from old to young						
21. Many local producers						
22. Master Gardeners of London						
						
23. Strong community garden network and interest						
24. Beautiful Edibles						

## FOOD PRODUCTION



25. Specialization in and high percentage of province’s green pea, sweet corn, and green/wax bean production

26. Storybook Gardens (demonstration garden)



27. Strong CSA model starting to flourish

28. Ontario Federation of Agriculture

29. Middlesex 4-H Association

30. Agricultural societies

31. Horticultural societies

32. Producer associations

33. London Food Bank Community Harvest Program

### 3.4 Areas to Cultivate

Three areas to cultivate in Food Production were identified as part of the community food assessment process. To start, much agriculture in Middlesex-London is focused on the large-scale production of commodity crops for export. This is leading to a decrease in the number of small-scale producers and an increase in the number of large and more powerful producers. As noted above, the number of farms in the area decreased by 25.6% from 1991 to 2011 and, of the 2052 farms in 2011, 64% were involved in oilseed and grain farming. While some stakeholders accepted that this is the result of the interplay of existing market forces, others indicated that planning policy, the cost of land, unequal government support, are all contributing factors to this situation. Therefore, one area to cultivate in Middlesex-London’s food system is small-scale agriculture. This includes alternative agriculture and food production in both urban and peri-urban areas; that is, the area between town and country. Viewed as living assets, such small-scale plots are all worth growing and protecting.

Although the use of sustainable production methods is increasing across Canada, of 2052 farms in Middlesex-London in 2011, only 27 reported certified organic products for sale while 3 reported transitional organic products for sale. The number of farms producing organic products has increased from 8 in 2006 but this is because there were 24 farms transitioning to organic at that time, whereas there were only 3 farms transitioning to organic in 2011. *Organic farming is only one manifestation of sustainable agriculture*, and many Middlesex-London

farmers have been attending Environmental Farm Plan workshops, as well as, preparing Environmental Farm Plan action plans. However, stakeholders identified a lack of knowledge around both the definition of sustainable as well as the diversity of sustainable production methods available to farmers, not to mention the costs associated with transitioning away from more conventional farming methods. It is also important to note that the **community identified** sustainable agriculture as a second area to cultivate.

Finally, as noted above, the average age of farm operators is increasing. As a result, this underlines the need to plan for and support future farmers. However, there are significant barriers for new farmers, such as increased land prices, the cost of meeting agriculture standards, and limited access to resources. Key informants empathized with the fact that farming is far more difficult than it used to be in terms of financial viability and, because existing family farms are deep into oilseed production, new generations will have to keep cash cropping in order to make money. Community members also noted that, along with the stigma attached to farming, it is difficult to bridge the knowledge gap between experienced and new farmers. Therefore, the third Food Production area to cultivate in Middlesex-London is building and supporting a community of new generation farmers.

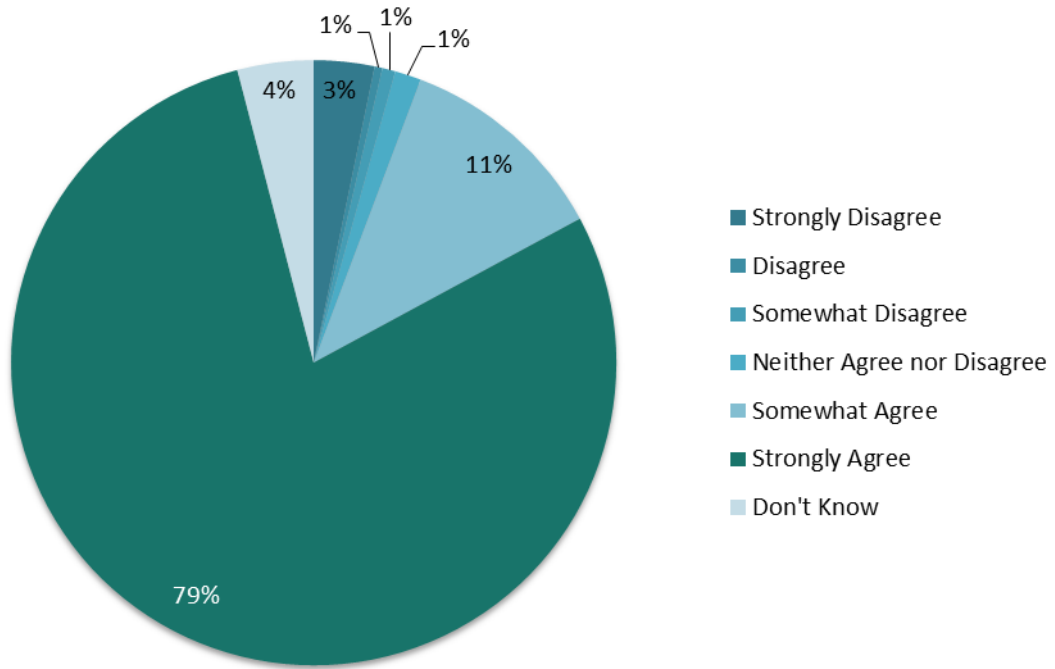
### **3.5 Opportunities for Change**

As part of the community survey (see Community Engagement) residents of Middlesex-London were asked to rate their level of agreement with three statements related to food production. The statements follow:

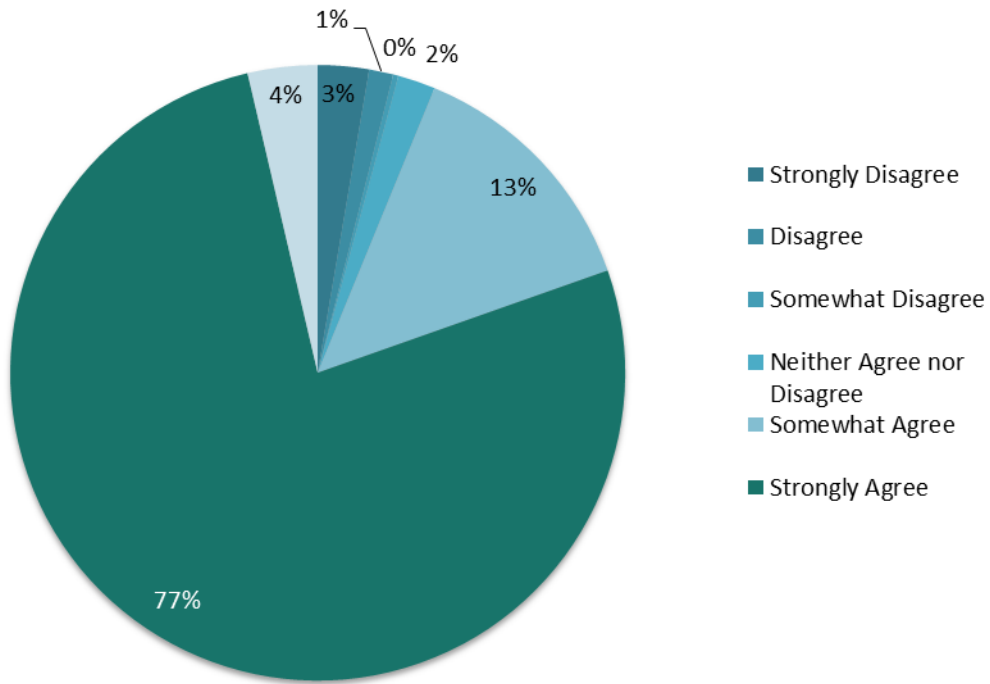
- It is important that as local farmers get older, others are supported to start farming;
- It is important that food is grown or farm animals are raised using sustainable practices in Middlesex-London; and
- It is important that there is support to grow food in the City.

On the whole, a large majority of community members “strongly agreed” with each of the three statements (Figures 28, 29 and 30).

**Figure 28: Statement: It is important that as local farmers get older, others are supported to start farming**

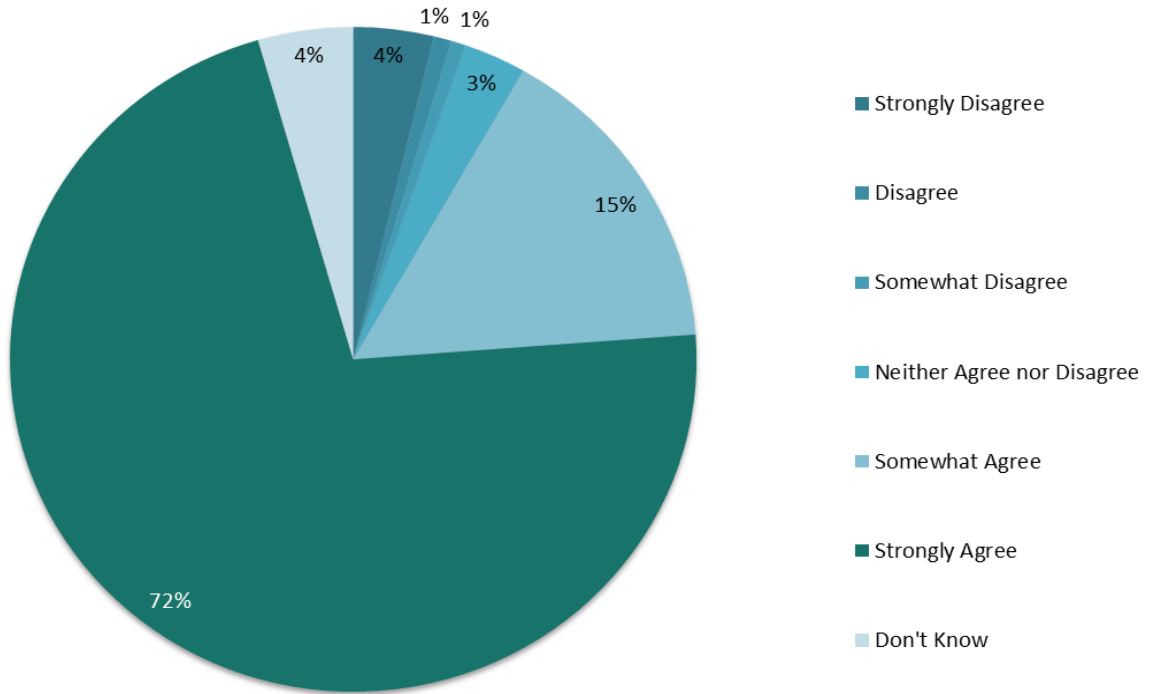


**Figure 29: Statement: It is important that food is grown or farm animals are raised using sustainable practices in Middlesex-London**





**Figure 30: Statement: It is important that there is support to grow food in the City**



As part of the community engagement process a number of key opportunities to cultivate changes in food production in Middlesex-London were unearthed by key informants and community members. To support small-scale producers, it was suggested that land zoning policy be developed to accommodate smaller farms. Assisting small local producers in marketing and retailing their product was another opportunity that came up, and the establishment of a local food hub was suggested as a way to do this. A local food hub could collect and store product from small producers in the area and even help to facilitate the logistics involved in alternative distribution. The reallocation of funding for large-scale farming to small-scale farmers was another opportunity that stakeholders identified to support small-scale agriculture. Community members noted that this should be coupled with training farmers to scale up and manage their own growth.

Numerous opportunities to promote sustainable agriculture across Middlesex-London were identified. Some examples include: using regulation to ensure that animal farming is ethical and humane; incentivizing and rewarding sustainable farm practice while promoting it as a career choice; and supporting farmers who choose to move to towards more sustainable farming practices and renewable energy sources. In addition to initiatives directed at the start of the supply chain, community members suggested that an acceptable definition of sustainable needs to be created. With standardized information on sustainable production methods and tracking tools, as well as the value of implementing them, the public can then be made better aware of the importance of consuming local, sustainable food. Similarly, champions of sustainable production can also be celebrated.

To support new and young farmers while leveraging the knowledge of an existing but aging farm population, community members see there being an opportunity to increase public education around farming and promote agriculture as a career. The development of support programs, such as farm mentorship and internship programs and farm incubators, were presented as potential opportunities for change. These types of programs could allow youth to be exposed to agriculture before deciding on it as a career; however, community members suggested that if and when new generations decide to farm then there needs to be assistance for them in securing land. Both subsidization and the protection of new farm businesses through cost-neutralizing or guaranteed income programs were suggested as ways to do this. Working with the existing agricultural community was identified as a key component of regional succession planning and vital to the realization of new farming generations.

Finally, the need to support urban agriculture was a theme that flowed throughout the community engagement process. The creation of more community gardens was identified as a key opportunity for the community. Supporting other urban food projects, such as rooftop gardens, the planting of food producing trees in public spaces, removing barriers to front-yard vegetable gardening, and making use of existing public space to grow food, were all noted as great opportunities to grow alternative food production in Middlesex-London.

