

2019 Ontario Envirothon

Presentation Challenge Scenario

Theme: AGROECOLOGY

Agroecology: A Tool for Your Community

Agroecology is a holistic approach to farming and food production that could shape how we feed the world in the 21st century¹.

Agroecology has three facets:

1. A scientific discipline involving the holistic study of agro-ecosystems, including human and environmental elements
2. A set of principles and practices to enhance the ecological, socio-economic, and cultural sustainability and resilience of farming systems
3. A social movement advocating for a change in the way agriculture and its relationships with society are considered

In the context of a changing climate and growing concerns for the sustainability of healthy food production systems, agroecology is gaining momentum as a scientific discipline, sustainable farming approach, and social movement. There is growing anecdotal and case study evidence of its multiple benefits, from enhancing climate resilience and improving farm productivity. However, its promotion in public agricultural policies, research, and extension are still limited².

This is where you come in!

Your town is updating its Official Plan, which sets out policies for growth and development. Specifically, work needs to be done on the Agricultural Policies which have not been updated since the 1980s. Your **Envirothon Team** is a group of highly motivated, passionate individuals from the community which have been elected to sit on the **Agricultural Advisory Board**.

Your town council has an interest in promoting a local and resilient food system, but they don't know how to get there. The job of the Agricultural Advisory Board is to provide advice to the town on which policies to adopt in order to move towards this goal.

When towns and municipalities are developing local planning policies, they often look beyond their own borders to see what neighbours are doing. In 2012, the **Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan**³ was launched by what has now become the **Greater Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance**. Since its inception, seven municipal and regional councils across the Golden Horseshoe region have endorsed the Plan. Although your town may not fall within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Plan has several key takeaways that your community may find useful. Specifically, the Action Plan provides five broad strategies and specific actions to

ensure that the Golden Horseshoe is home to a globally-recognized and vibrant food and farming cluster.

The Key takeaways from the Action Plan are as follows:

1. **Grow the Cluster:** Become the leading food and farming cluster in the world, renowned for healthy and safe food products. This will be accomplished by coordinating economic development, finding the voids, filling the gaps, and building on the strengths of the region.
2. **Link Food, Farming, and Health:** Educate current and future consumers about the critical role locally-sourced food and farming products play in enhancing health and well-being. This will be done by working closely with a broad range of stakeholders to educate and inform consumers about healthy food products from the region.
3. **Foster Innovation:** Encourage and support innovation to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the Golden Horseshoe food and farming cluster. This opportunity will be realized by strategically positioning the agriculture, food processing, retail, and service sectors in the Golden Horseshoe as the best place to do business.
4. **Enable the Cluster:** Align policy tools and their application to enable food and farming businesses to be increasingly competitive and profitable. Harmonizing regulations, providing one-stop shopping for approvals, and creating an open-for-business environment are the key strategies to meet this opportunity.
5. **Cultivate New Approaches:** Pilot new approaches to support food and farming in the Golden Horseshoe by becoming a leader in research and program development³.

Your Presentation Challenge

- A. Create a presentation to council for their next meeting which will help inform your town's agricultural policy development.
- B. Council members have heard of the **Alliance** and the **Food and Farming Action Plan** and they have asked for your feedback on it. Although the Action Plan is a good starting point, take the opportunity to inform the council on the concepts of Agroecology.
- C. Focus on the **Key Takeaways** from the Action Plan and educate council on which key **Agroecology** concepts you think will be useful in your specific context. Make it easy to understand for the council, as they may not have your expert knowledge on the subject.
- D. What does **Agroecology** have to offer in regards to the specific challenges faced by your community?
- E. It's up to you to determine what your local challenges are. Examples might include:
 - a. Challenges faced by **beginning farmers** (e.g. access to capital, affordable land, and mentors)
 - b. **Soil health** issues (e.g. topsoil erosion, water infiltration, salinization, compaction)
 - c. **Climate Change** (e.g. how do we farm in a resilient way to mitigate climatic extremes?)
 - d. **Lack of farming support industries** in your community (e.g. processing/value-added businesses, abattoirs, farm supply stores etc.)
- F. Lastly – tell us about all this in **12 to 15** minutes!

It's not your job to figure out how to feed nine billion people, however, with your knowledge on the concepts of Agroecology and the expert advice you have provided to the town council, hopefully your town will be able to at least feed itself.

This may not be an easy challenge, but it is a necessary one. By creating solutions in your own backyard, you can become a leader in the upcoming food movement that promotes food sovereignty and the conservation of valuable natural resources⁴.

For more information, check out the [Rules & Regulations](#) or the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) documents on the [Ontario Envirothon](#) website.

Citations

1. Dunn, R. (2015). Agroecology: How It Can Help Feed the World. Retrieved from <https://www.madfeed.co/2015/agroecology-how-it-can-help-feed-the-world/>
2. Silici, L. (2014). Agroecology: What it is and what it has to offer. Issue Paper 14629IIED. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
3. Walton, M., & Farrar, J., DiFrancesco, R., Huber, A. & Lockhart, E. (2012). *Golden Horseshoe agriculture and agri-food strategy: Food and farming: An action plan 2021*. Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee. Retrieved from http://www.gtaaac.ca/pdfs/Action_Plan.pdf
4. USC Canada. (2017). Agroecology. Retrieved from <https://www.usc-canada.org/the-issues/agroecology>.