

## GTA AAC Annual Summer Bus Tour Showcases Industry Innovation

July 15: By Anne Howden Thompson - Innovation will be the focus of this week's Greater Toronto Area Agriculture Action Committee (GTA AAC) summer bus tour throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Janet Horner, GTA AAC executive director says the focus of the tour is to examine the different pieces of the food chain and see how farmers and businesses are innovating in order to make their businesses better.

The first stop of the day is at Real Foods for Real Kids, a Toronto food processor that provides 5,500 healthy, locally-sourced and seasonal meals daily for daycare centers in the Toronto-area.

The tour then moves into Peel Region, with stops scheduled at Armstrong Manor Farm and Spirit Tree Estate Cidery.

Armstrong Manor Farms is a large-scale, progressive and thriving dairy operation on the edge of urban development that continue to innovate to push their operation forward. Visitors will also see one of the newest solar installations.

Spirit Tree Estate Cidery, owned by Tom Wilson and Nicole Judge, has earned numerous awards to its credit since opening their doors last fall, including being named as a regional winner of the Premier's Awards for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. But the young couple has also endured many obstacles and hardships during the building phase of their operation and they will share some of the regulatory challenges they encountered with tour participants.

The group will then travel into the Holland Marsh to see farmers who are using innovation to grow, process and market their products. "Farmers here are innovating their crop choices so they can meet market demand instead of just doing the same old, same old," says Horner.

The final stop includes a visit to the Farmstart McVean Incubator Farm in Brampton, an initiative that helps give new Canadians access to land and learn about Canadian agriculture. "It is a model for introducing new Canadians to the farm," says Horner.

The tour takes place Thursday, July 15 and has attracted a wide range of industry participants, including municipal planners, economic development, sustainability and health department staff from throughout the GTA.

