



# Message from the chair

January 28, 2011

## New appointees

At the Wednesday, January 19, 2011 board meeting we were pleased to welcome the following new appointees to our Greater Toronto Area Agriculture Action Committee (GTAAAC):

- The City of Toronto - Councillor Chin Lee and Jodi Callan, planner;
- Region of Peel: Patti Foley, Regional Councillor (alternate for Regional Councilor Allan Thompson);
- York Region: Gerald Killington, York Federation of Agriculture;
- Region of Durham: Gerri Lynn O'Connor, Mayor of Uxbridge

We are still looking for a representative for the Municipality of York Region.

## Board structure

We are also changing our board structure by replacing the voting member seats occupied by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) seats. The representatives from AAFC and OMAFRA will still sit at the board table as advisors and we are looking for new members to take these seats to represent the food processing industry and retail industry. These changes will take place at our Annual General Meeting, which will be held Wednesday, March 30, 2011.

## Agriculture input for municipal sustainability plans

The working group of planners for the GTA AAC has drafted a response that can be used by municipalities who are looking for input to their sustainability plans. In general,

communities tend to forget to ask for agricultural input to these plans and the working group has prepared some excellent suggestions to help them include the input required. This draft will be sent to all Federations of Agriculture in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for comment and any additional ideas.

The board also approved a motion to make a delegation to the Ministries of Agriculture and Health to brief them on some of the preliminary results of our Strategy report.

## Food and Agriculture Strategy update

On the evening of Wednesday, January 19, the GTA AAC offered a presentation of Phase One of the draft Food and Agriculture Strategy at Black Creek Pioneer Village. 40 invited guests listened carefully to Margaret Walton of Planscape as she highlighted the data her team had been researching and compiling for the last few months. Much of the data used to profile the agricultural sector in the Golden Horseshoe and Holland Marsh areas was compiled earlier by economic impact studies Planscape had completed in each of the individual regions. Margaret spent a significant amount of time describing the agri-food cluster in the study area. The GTA has the second largest food processing cluster in North America and combined with Hamilton, Niagara and the Holland Marsh, it may be the largest cluster in North America, rivaling the auto industry. Unlike the auto industry, where withdrawal of one major manufacturer would have near catastrophic consequences, the food and beverage industry is complex and diverse and there is no single major player. The sheer number of firms and the different sectors proves it to be a resilient industry. The mutual interdependence among firms and their

collective presence creates a “critical mass” for certain key inputs. This is the defining factor of a successful cluster.

The study revealed some startling statistics.

Agricultural production and processing in the study region was over \$12 billion and total output impact in the broader province and national economies was almost \$35 billion, with more than \$7 billion in labour income, creating or maintaining more than 212,000 jobs in 2008! Even though these results are conservative (i.e. wholesale, retail and food service was not considered), they lend substantial weight to the pleas of groups like the Ontario Farmland Trust that farmland is something that should be protected. When the total output multipliers or spin-off effect is taken into account, primary agriculture and food and related processing in the study area showed a total output of more than \$127 billion provincially and nationally in 2005 values, compared to \$159 billion for the auto industry. After last year’s auto industry melt down and considering the inclusion of the wholesale, retail and food service industries, it is safe to say that agriculture and food processing are the engines driving the Ontario and national economies. This statement is reinforced by the announcement of the *Growing the Canadian Food Processing Sector – An Industry/Food Processing Action Plan* by Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State in Vancouver on January 24, 2011, acknowledging that agriculture and food processing is the largest employer in the country.

If this is the case, it begs the question, “Why doesn’t OMAFRA and AAFC play more of a lead role in policy creation in the province and country?” This is a question I intend to ask the provincial agriculture minister when we meet with her.

The guests, who represented a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the Golden Horseshoe, were invited to ask questions after the presentation and encouraged to make comments, both verbally at the meeting and later in writing via email to our coordinator, Janet Horner.

The guests were also presented with a list of suggested actions that the GTA AAC executive compiled to stimulate an even bigger list.

## Upcoming GTA AAC events:

• **Thursday, March 10: Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Summit at Evergreen Brick Works, Toronto.**

• **Wednesday, March 30: GTA AAC Annual General Meeting at Black Creek Pioneer Village, Toronto**

Judging by comments after the presentation and by emails sent, Phase One of the Strategy was well received and on the “right track”. There were a few cautionary comments such as, “The Strategy needs to be treated as a living document and not put on a shelf like so many others”, “You need to engaged the public”, “We need to break down the silos between government ministries”, “The horticultural plant industry has many of the same challenges as the agri-food industry and could play a large roll in climate change”, and “The conservation authorities can help with research on Goods and Services credits”.

On Thursday, March 10, a summit is scheduled and a larger group of stakeholders will be invited to comment on the second draft of the strategy. This will complete Phase Two of the strategy. Phase Three will be the roll out of our communications strategy and presentation and implementation of the 10-year action plan.

These are exciting times and I look forward to the successful completion of the Food and Agricultural Strategy and driving the Action Plan.

Respectfully,  
Nick Ferri, Chair, GTAAAC

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**Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC)**

**Janet M. Horner, Coordinator**

**Email : [janet@whitfieldfarms.com](mailto:janet@whitfieldfarms.com)**

**Phone: 519-925-5975**

**Website: [www.gtaaac.ca](http://www.gtaaac.ca)**

**Twitter: @GTA \_ AAC**

