



# Message from the chair

December 17, 2010

## Communications Plan

When I accepted the nomination for this position several months ago I indicated that one of my priorities was to improve the communication process within the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC) and with the various levels of government and the organizations who have partnered with us. In the spring of 2010 we asked the current class (13) of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) if they would put together a communications plan for us. Through the summer and fall they surveyed the board members to get a better understanding of our organization. At our November meeting the AALP team presented the Communications Plan that they had been working on. The Communications Plan recommends that key messages be used when communicating with target audiences; message that will change depending on the audience, ie. primary producers, consumers, government or policy makers.

On behalf of our board I would like to thank the AALP team of John Borland, Sarah Brown, Darlene Downey, Neil Hemingway and Melanie Williams for the excellent job they have done. Our board will now use this document as a template to develop our communications strategy and guide us in the future.

The need for improved internal communication amongst our group was identified within the AALP team's Communication Plan, and as one of our earliest initiatives to action the Communication Plan I am pleased to introduce this newsletter format, the first of a series of bimonthly newsletters which will be published to keep the members and friends of the GTAAAC updated with our activities. If you wish to have information included in this letter, please contact me ([bigapple@orchard-studio.com](mailto:bigapple@orchard-studio.com)) or Janet Horner ([janet@whitfieldfarms.com](mailto:janet@whitfieldfarms.com)). We are rolling out this first issue before the end of the year and a regular bi-monthly publication schedule will commence in the New Year.

Online access is also a critical tool in communications and we are developing a new website. The board wants this to become a "go to" place for news about our organization and our activities and will remain an active work in progress. The new URL is [www.gtaa.ca](http://www.gtaa.ca)

## Financing our future

Marilyn Pearce is chairing the initiative to look to our funding needs for the future. It is estimated that it takes \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year to fund the projects we do and to operate the organization. While the regions gave money (from the provincial government) to start the GTAAAC, future funding may not come from this source and we need to seek alternatives. A working group has been struck to write a proposal to the RED (Rural Economic Development) program.

## Harvest Market at the Royal

The GTAAAC, with the assistance of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair (RAWF) and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA), brought a number of farmers, including our own Ted Eng, to exhibit at the RAWF in the Harvest Market area. This new initiative turned out to be very successful. The thrust of the project was to bring local food and farmers that grow it to the fore front. The space in the Upper East Annex was provided for free by the RAWF. Because of its popularity we will try to reproduce it next year on the main level where there is more traffic and where the farmers will be able to hand our samples of their produce. This was also a good opportunity to develop a marketing opportunity as suggested in the AALP communications plan. Three unique recipe cards were developed profiling three different farmers in the Greater Toronto Area and featuring a recipe that showcases the products they grow. Key messages selected by the AALP team from the recently published GTA Agricultural Profile were included on the backside of the recipe card. A total of four thousand cards were printed and all but a handful were left at the end of the show. This particular project came together very quickly and I would like to thank Janet Horner and Anne Howden Thompson for doing an excellent job putting these cards together.

## Durham Region Farmer's Market

The GTAAAC agreed to help fund the development of a business plan for an indoor farmers market in Durham Region. The market will be modeled after the very

successful indoor Calgary Farmer's Market. The understanding is that the business plan will be shared with other municipalities in the GTA who also wish to have indoor farmers markets in their area.

## Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy

In July 2009 Vineland Research and Innovation Centre in partnership with the GTAAAC hosted a facilitated session to discuss the coordination of agricultural sustainability issues. During this session representatives from the agricultural jurisdictions around the Golden Horseshoe, including regional governments, local federations of agriculture, provincial and federal representatives and stakeholder groups discussed the gaps and potential solutions for agricultural sustainability. Consensus was reached that a strategy and action plan were needed for the whole of the Golden Horseshoe and the geographic area of the Holland Marsh.

In the winter of 2010 a request for proposals was issued to support the creation of a 10-year strategy and action plan. The purpose of the 10-year Strategy and Action Plan is to guide decision making, investments, strategic alliances and processes to support sustainable, profitable, dynamic and healthy agricultural development and enhancement of the agri-food value chain throughout the Golden Horseshoe and Holland Marsh areas.

We are currently working on Phase 1 of the strategy, the collection and assimilation of information. On December 8<sup>th</sup> the consultant team presented an outline of the strategy and action items that they have been working on.

Specifically this report provides insight into:

- existing agriculture/agri-food enterprises and opportunities;
- identifies challenges associated with expanding and diversifying agriculture/agri-food products;
- the extent to which a agriculture and agri-food value chain exists in the Golden Horseshoe;
- A comparison all facets of agriculture, food production and processing in the study area
- Identifies opportunities & challenges for commercial agriculture and food processing, crops for export, ethno cultural and specialty crops, bio based production and

processing, value added enterprises, and tourism that drive regional economic development;

- Alternative and complementary uses for agricultural lands;
- Current agriculture and food policies, charters, strategy and action plans, and procurement policies at federal, provincial, city and regional levels;
- The health benefits of the food produced by farmers in Golden Horseshoe;
- the economic development impact agriculture has in the study area;
- The potential financial impact of imported commodities and processed foods that could be supplied from within the Golden Horseshoe;
- the characteristics of comparative regions of the world including the programs, legislation and regulations that make them flourish;
- The potential role of publicly owned lands in support of agricultural activity; and
- issues of food sovereignty and security within the Golden Horseshoe

The working group is now in the process of analyzing the draft plan and through a conference call on December 21, will provide feedback. Based on this feedback the consultants will make a presentation of the draft strategy to the GTAAAC at their monthly meeting in January. This meeting will be open to all the stakeholders involved and feedback will be invited. The meeting will be held at Black Creek Pioneer Village on January 19, 2011 at 5:30 pm.

A summit is also being planned for the beginning of February to give stakeholders, partners and interested groups the opportunity to view and comment on the strategy during its final draft. I will keep you posted as to the time and location of the summit.

In closing, on behalf of the GTAAAC Board of Directors we wish everyone a safe and happy Holiday Season.

Respectfully,  
Nick Ferri, Chair, GTAAAC

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