



Message from the chair

February 25, 2011

Ontario Farmland Trust: Renewing Rural Economies Forum

Can one person make a difference? Apparently he or she can. That point was driven home when I attended the recent Renewing Rural Economies Forum hosted by the Ontario Farmland Trust conference. The majority of attendees were economic developers and planners from around Ontario who were networking to see what methods work when trying to stimulate local economies. It was interesting to note the number of the presenters from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). I realize that we still have along way to go when it comes to improving farm viability in the rural areas of the GTA, but it seems we have done some things right and it showed by the interest taken in the presentations. Collaboration among farmers, planners and economic developers and working closely with municipal councilors are things that we have excelled at. It was no surprise that Marlene Werry of Durham Region was asked to present twice. Having a dedicated agricultural and rural economic developer like Marlene has put agriculture and food in the forefront in Durham Region. Two other economic developers made impressive contributions to the conference--Paul Nichol from Huron County and Dan Taylor from Prince Edward County. One observation by Dan Taylor stuck in my mind. "Politicians make decisions based on the rear view mirror. Farmers and economic developers make decisions base on the windshield view. They are always thinking ahead," he said. Nichol also another interesting comment--"Our economy was agricultural based the first 10,000 years. The last 100 years it was industrial based. The last 30 years has been the information and innovation age. Rural Ontario for the most part is still in the first category," he said.

Recent studies have proven that agriculture and food processing is the new driving engine for the Ontario

economy. The studies also show that the food processing clusters in the Golden Horseshoe area are now most likely the largest in North America. Historically, rural settlements were established to service the farming businesses. Maybe, we need to build on our successes and use locally produced food and promote more food processing in near urban communities.

Ontario Fresh website under development

As a member of the original consultation group I was invited last week to comment by telephone conference on a mock up of the Ontario Fresh website that is currently under construction. The Friends of The Greenbelt are heading this project up for the purpose of expanding the market for buyers and sellers of local Ontario food. It is an electronic marketplace with an exclusive focus on business to business relationships. I have been particularly interested in this project because it addresses one of the concerns of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC)--how do we "rebuild the middle", the connection between the local food growers and the players along the food service value chain that are looking for it? One of the concerns expressed during the consultation was the lack of detail in describing the foods being produced for sale. As an example, one of the listings was "Apples" with no other explanation as to variety. The same could be said for other the fruits and vegetables. If this is going to be the "go to site" where buyers and sellers come together, it has to be easy to use and have as much detail as possible. If a chef goes to the site, he/she will have very specific preferences on not only variety but also colour and size of foods being offered.

There are concerns that the site will be "slapped together" because of time and money limitations. This

project is too important. It can be a critical piece of the puzzle in local and provincial food strategies. If done right it would also create demand by tracking buyer preferences. If a certain type of fruit or vegetable is constantly being asked for but not available, it could be potentially profitable for an established farmer to grow or even a way for a new farmer to get into the market place. We need to get this right. If it takes more time and money, then, so be it. Lets step up to the plate and make sure it happens.

Royal Agricultural Winter Fair Marketplace

At our last GTAAAC meeting we discussed participation at the 2011 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. The board listed a number of considerations to be negotiated with fair management. The Farmers' Market theme was very well received last year and will continue this year. The location will have to be on the main level and at a cost that is acceptable to the participating farmer (farmers covering cost of general entry and parking as last year). Starting now will provide more time to promote the farmers market to Ontario farmers who would like to participate.

Provincial pre-budget consultation

I would like to thank our coordinator, Janet Horner and Holland Marsh Growers' Executive Director, Jamie Reaume for their work on the GTAAAC pre-budget submission to the province. They did an excellent job considering the very tight timeline. The submission touched on a number of issues such as a business risk management program for the edible horticultural sector; the passage and implementation of Bill 78 – Taxation Amendment Act (Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers); a rural secretariat to coordinate legislation from ministries that intersect with farming and food; the farm perspective in dealing with the Provincial Policy Statement; a province-wide food strategy; promoting good stewardship of the land by continuing funding for the Environmental Farm Plan, long term leases on rented land and sustainable agricultural practices on public land; enhancing Foodland Ontario funding; education, public health and the buy local movement; the establishment of local food infrastructure through regional food clusters, including the need for regional food

Upcoming GTA AAC events:

- **Wednesday, March 30: Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Summit at Evergreen Brick Works, Toronto.**
- **Wednesday, March 30: GTA AAC Annual General Meeting at Evergreen Brick Works, Toronto**

distribution centres like the one proposed by the Holland Marsh Growers' Association.

At press time we received an acknowledgement of our pre-budget submission from The Honourable Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance. He thanked us for our suggestions and ideas for the 2011 Ontario Budget and would be pleased to receive any additional comments if we would like to submit them.

Food and Agriculture Strategy update

The Golden Horseshoe Agriculture and Food Strategy is progressing on the revised schedule. Margaret Walton's Planscape team will be meeting with the Steering Committee (GTAAAC, Hamilton and Niagara) and the Regional Planners and Economic Developers Working Group on Mon. Feb. 28 and again on Thurs. March 17. The March. 17 meeting will be at the Evergreen Brick Works and the facilitator will be present to prepare for the workshop, also at Evergreen Brick Works on Wed. March 30. Space is limited and invitations to industry stakeholders have been issued. Confirmation of attendance at the workshop will be required by RSVP. The Annual General Meeting of GTAAAC will follow that evening, also at Evergreen Brick Works.

Respectfully,
Nick Ferri, Chair, GTAAAC

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