

## **Chair's Report – May/June 2012**

It's been a very busy and somewhat stressful time both on the farm and off since I last wrote. Many of our tender fruit and apple producers are reeling with the loss of much of this year's crop due to unseasonably warm March weather followed by the unwelcome visit of killer frosts. From Niagara, home of 90 per cent of Ontario's tender fruit harvest, through Peel, Durham, York, Halton Regions and up into Southern Georgian Bay, the wreckage has been great – with some estimating as much as 80 per cent of the province's apple crop being affected as well as 30 to 40 per cent loss of peaches and great losses of cherry and plum crops. According to Brian Gilroy, Chair of the Ontario Apple Growers, the potential impact is "huge" for the spinoff businesses and ultimately consumers.

This most unfortunate turn of events underscores the value and impact of agriculture on our economy; as weather wreaks havoc on crops many along the Agri-food value chain suffer and consumers pay the price as well.

And it underlines the great need for all of us to work together to support a more integrated and innovative approach to food and farming in Ontario. And while I am saddened to hear of the suffering so many of our colleagues are going through, I am buoyed by the level of activity, collaboration and support that is growing amongst many players and partners across the spectrum of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by the level of activity over the past six weeks or so.

For instance, in April, our Executive Director Janet Horner made a presentation about the Action Plan to more than 125 participants at a day-long Food Summit organized by the Public Health Unit of The Headwaters which includes Dufferin-Wellington County and Caledon. Participants included the whole spectrum of groups with an interest in local food from public health professionals and educators to farmers and municipal officials. We've since received a letter from folks in Dufferin asking if they could use some elements of the plan in a food strategy they are preparing for their area.

The GTA AAC was also invited to make a presentation about the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan to more than 60 participants at a session held by the Canadian Urban Institute on May 11 in Toronto. Representatives from academia, industry, farm organizations, municipalities, the Ontario Food Terminal and other provinces were clearly interested in the Action Plan and asked many questions. Janet Horner and Hans Feldman, our new coordinator, subsequently acted on an invitation from the Food Terminal to tour the facility and learn about the workings of this major distribution hub.

The momentum of interest is clearly growing. In May, Peter Lambrick, outlined the Action Plan to Halton Hills Council and I did the same in Caledon. Later in the month, on May 22, Janet and Hans presented the plan to the North Durham Tri-Council which includes the Townships of Uxbridge, Scugog and Brock and is a part of the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors' Alliance. All three mayors attended and were encouraged to keep food and farming thriving both in Durham and across the Golden Horseshoe.

The GTA AAC continues to receive letters and accolades. Recently we received correspondence from the federal government's proposed Rouge National Urban Park, suggesting our organization has been instrumental in its formation and therefore is invited to be a part of the Advisory Committee for the group – a most welcoming development that will enable us to be a part of the process from the early stages and hopefully increase awareness and appreciation of the important role food and farming can have in urban settings.

And we're looking forward to some other exciting developments. On the evening of the summer solstice June 21, the GTA AAC together with organizing partners Sustain Ontario and West End Food Co-op will host the Toronto premiere of *To Make a Farm*, named one of the ten most popular Canadian films at the Vancouver International Film Festival. It's a thought-provoking documentary that explores the lives of five young people who have chosen to become small-scale farmers despite having no farming backgrounds. While they face many daily challenges, their optimism inspires hope for the future of local food and farming. Tarrah Young of Green Being Farm in Neustadt Ontario is featured in the film and will be a special guest at the launch along with the Director Producer, Steve Suderman and second generation farmer Audrey MacDonald.. Tickets can be purchased for \$13 at the door of the Royal Theatre at 608 College Street West in Toronto where doors open at 6:30 pm that evening. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our promoting partners Farmstart, Foodshare Toronto, The Stop and the Toronto Food Policy Council.

So, as we draw to the close of the planting season, we look forward to growing the momentum of activity. Our new Board of Directors including Allan Thompson, Ted Eng, Fiona Nelson and Marlene McClure, is ready to take on the challenges and the opportunities of the coming months. We all look forward to meeting you at our next Board meeting on June 20 at Black Creek Pioneer Village.