



Message from the chair

April 11, 2011

*Enhancing
and Energizing
the GTA Local Food System*

Food and Farming Action Plan Update

What a great day! The Food and Farming Action Plan Summit was exciting and productive. Some very important decisions and recommendations for the future were formulated. Erik Lockhart, of Queens University facilitated, creating a stimulating atmosphere with his electronic ideas compilation process. Without this process and with over one hundred people in the room, things could have gotten out of hand very quickly.

Planscape developed a workbook for participants addressing four issues:

- A) Food and Farming Cluster: A Growth Opportunity
- B) Food, Health and Society
- C) Innovation Across the Golden Horseshoe: The Food and Farming Value Chain
- D) Smart Use of Regulations and Resources

Each table had representatives from a variety of sectors who discussed ideas, presented and identified new ideas. Using laptops and unique, specialized software, ideas from the participants were captured and actions prioritized, ranked in importance. No actions were discarded. By the end of the day about fifteen key actions were identified and requests were made for individuals or organizations to champion these actions. This was the most critical part of the process. Without a champion for an action there would be little hope of a strategic goal being accomplished. I am very pleased to tell you that a

significant number of people stepped up to the plate and took ownership of some important actions.

A report and compilation of actions is being completed and will be available soon. One action that stood out and was voted on unanimously as being critical was that food literacy knowledge of the food production, nutrition and food preparation be re-introduced as curriculum in primary and secondary schools. This would help the next generation make healthy food choices and teach them to prepare healthy meals using fresh ingredients. Having young people armed with the ability to make healthy food choices will go a long way to improving childhood obesity and the prevention of associated disease.

In the next few months more consultations will be scheduled with stakeholder groups and the Food and Farming Action Plan will be finalized. From there, the steering committee composed of members of the Greater Toronto Area Agriculture Action Committee (GTAAAC) and representatives from Hamilton and Niagara will start to work with the individuals and groups to champion the prioritized actions and start to make this vision a reality. To make this work, additional funding will have to be secured. We will be approaching government and private organizations who see the enormous opportunities for economic growth, good health and revitalized natural environment in the Golden Horseshoe.

continued on next page...

Premier's Summit on Agri-Food

I had the opportunity to attend the Premier's Summit on Agri-Food last week. It was a grand event with representation from the retail, processing, agri-food education and farming sectors of the food industry. Speakers and panel discussions were held with the purpose of familiarizing each sector with the other's capabilities. The Premier's Awards for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence were also presented at this event. The Premier's Award went to Paul and Rosie Hill of Willow Grove Hill Farm, Perth County, a farrow to finish pork operation that naturally feed and supplement their animals with Omega 3 fatty acids and selenium; with Lisa and Arie Duizer, of Duizer Farms, Brant County, an innovative robotic dairy being named as the Minister's Award Winner.

Issues such as food safety and quality, reforming regulatory framework, tax incentives to attract new businesses, increased private and public research and development in colleges and universities and innovation centres were discussed in panels and by the speakers. There is also a trend towards sustainability standards as witnessed by the coffee and tea industries and companies such as Unilever, Nestle, PepsiCo and Walmart developing these strict codes. This will have an impact on all farming operations in these markets or for operations planning to try to access them. Tesco in the United Kingdom has been demanding these standards since 1992 and now has 15,000 growers from 70 countries under compliance.

In Ontario, Local Food Plus has developed a set of sustainability standards, which a growing number of farms are adhering to, and gaining access to new markets with a secured demand. Another bonus to attending the summit was the chance to network and share ideas with elected officials, government staff, processors, retailers and educators. I mentioned our food literacy idea to the premier who asked me to document it and send it along.

In all it was time well spent and more people are now aware of the GTAAAC and what we are trying to accomplish.

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting followed the Food and Farming Action Plan Summit on March 30. With the acceptance of the financial statement, the board members were made aware that the GTAAAC will be entering its' last year of funding. With new partners and tasked with 10 year strategy and action plan, the executive committee, as part of its work plan, will need to secure new funding. A formal summary of the completed actions and documentation of money spent in the execution of our original GTAAAC Action Plan will be finalized shortly and presented to the Regional Planning Commissioners and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Chair's Annual Report, financial statements, budget and work plan for 2011 will be posted on the GTAAAC web site.

An order of business for the meeting was the acceptance of the amendments of Bylaw #2, to change the board structure. It was a pleasure meeting several potential new board members who attended the annual meeting. Elections to fill the board member seats and executive positions will be held at our April meeting.

The year ahead may look daunting to some but I am confident that the present board of the GTAAAC and our partners will rise to the task as we begin to implement our new Strategy and 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

Phone: 519-925-5975

Website: www.gtaaac.ca

Twitter: @GTA _ AAC

