



Message from the Chair

August 12, 2011

I recently read an article that left me both confused and frustrated.

As you may know, we have been working on an agri-food strategy and ten year action plan for the Golden Horseshoe for the past year and a half and are close to a public release. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) are lobbying for a National Food Strategy and received the support of the provincial agricultural ministers at their meeting a few weeks ago in St. Andrews, New Brunswick with their federal counterpart, the Honourable Gerry Ritz.

A major component of all the food strategies is the procurement of local food for use in the public sector, such as in schools, hospitals, universities and government cafeterias. This practice would go a long way in helping local farmers, food processors and food service businesses to increase their profitability. There are a few champions in this effort. Local Food Plus has branded and developed markets for sustainable local food; Gordon Food Service, one of the largest food service providers in North America, is sourcing over 600 local food items and marketing them to their customers. The Broader Public Sector Investment Fund, a partnership between the Greenbelt Fund and the Ontario Ministry of Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), has helped to make grants available to groups who strive to increase the Ontario content of food available in food service outlets, public institutions and retail food stores.

A letter to the editor published in the July 19, 2011 issue of the *Ontario Farmer* by Anne Slater, a board member of the National Farmers Union (NFU), has left me confused. The NFU obtained a leaked draft text copy of the Canada-Europe Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), with the authenticity confirmed by Canada's chief negotiator. Although the position of the federal government hasn't been made clear, the procurement section of CETA states that, *"all government and government entities, including schools, hospitals, universities and municipalities will be prohibited from favouring local goods and services, including local food"*, which leaves me feeling frustrated. Canada wanted to have a signed CETA agreement by the end of the year. What will this mean for all the good work that has been done to promote local food procurement? I realize that we cannot provide all of the food items necessary to supply the needs of the citizens of our province but we definitely need to favour our local farmers and food processors! When governments make decisions they should be made with the best interests of the majority of Canadians in mind. Can we trust them to protect the farming community, the very people that feed them?

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Presentations to Council

Presentations have been made to the Regions of Durham and Halton and additional presentations will be scheduled for the Regions of Peel and York to report the activities and accomplishments of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC) over the last five years and documenting the disbursement of funds. At its inauguration the GTAAAC received a grant of \$800,000 from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to be administered through the four regional governments. This will be the final year for those funds. We thank the regions for the assistance provided by their staff to this committee. Their hard work has been a major contributor to our recognition and success.

Fall Tour

A tour entitled "City to Country, Country to City" is scheduled for Thursday, September 22, 2011. This will be a joint effort between Sustain Ontario and the GTAAAC. Sustain Ontario has taken the lead and will be providing funding. The GTAAAC will assist by providing farm sites and resources on the buses. There are 12 tours planned and over 200 attendees from both rural and urban areas are anticipated. The tours will end at Lawrence Park Community Centre for dinner and wrap up. More information will be forthcoming. Save the date.

Winterlicious

The City of Toronto is applying for an Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF) grant to promote local food and farmers in their annual "Winterlicious" program. They have asked the GTAAAC to be a co-applicant in the process by providing in-kind services, connecting farmers and chefs and identifying some retail outlets where local food can be readily purchased. Winterlicious, now in its tenth year, is a city-sponsored program involving 150 restaurants that will be featuring local food items on their menus from January 27 to February 9, 2012.

It is gratifying to note that over the past five years, the accomplishments of the GTAAAC have been recognized and its profile has been raised to the point where the committee is being used as a resource by other organizations and levels of government. The hard work and dedication of our volunteer board members, the executive director plus support by regional municipal staff and our advisors is paying off. The winners are the businesses that produce, process and sell local food and the Ontario citizens who eat it.

Respectfully,
Nick Ferri, Chair, GTAAAC

Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC)

Janet M. Horner, Coordinator

Email : janet@whitfieldfarms.com

Phone: 519-925-5975

Website: www.gtataac.ca

Twitter: @GTA _ AAC

