



GTA AAC Newsletter

On near-urban agriculture
and locally grown food

November 2007

Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee

Homegrown Ontario

Ontario Pork, the Ontario Veal Association and the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency have created an alliance to make it easy for consumers to support local farmers while purchasing fresh, quality meat.

John Iacobucci, Trade Ambassador for Homegrown Ontario, reported to the GTA AAC at its regular meeting in late October on the initial success of the new brand and logo. The program brands and promotes Ontario meats. The Alliance has created definitions that are more stringent than those used by Foodland Ontario: the meats must be raised, finished and processed in Ontario (http://www.hgontario.ca/trade_definitions.php). Both processors and retailers are encouraged to participate. Point of sale materials including posters, on-pack stickers, case clings and more, are provided free of charge to participating vendors who purchase their meat products from Homegrown Ontario approved suppliers.

The Alliance's goal is to double participation next year and then start addressing the food service sector.

- Retailers are harder to get on board than processors;
- Beef is not part of the program;
- Some retailers are not interested in all three commodities and so do not participate;
- Advertising dollars are not well spent if Ontario product is not always available;
- We can supply the regular market but supplies are sometimes not enough for retail features;
- Consumers tend to buy what they know how to prepare;
- Chefs are reluctant to participate if it takes a lot of time to source the product;
- Consistency is a big challenge with lamb. You have to get the supply before you can get the specs right.

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The Alliance has been encouraged by recent research that clearly indicates that consumers want to support local farmers. An Ipsos Reid poll on December 1, 2006 asked: "What would you say is the top benefit of buying locally grown meat?" The response from 66% of Canadian's was "supports family farmers."

GTA AAC at the Royal

Exhibit Location & Facility

The GTA AAC's location turned out to be excellent as traffic approached us from both sides and the one end. Much of the traffic moving from Hall A to Hall B needed to pass along our location.



By being part of Journey to Your Good Health, the Royal supplied tent, rug, some signage, electricity, decorative lights and the plant decorations. We borrowed a counter (thank you Ontario Federation of Agriculture) and a panel to support the large GTA map (thank you Durham Region). We rented three pieces of furniture: counter, table and stand.

It was great to have an exhibit through which visitors could walk. Many walked beside the large map and paused to study it. It was a great opportunity to ask if they knew where to get locally grown food.

Volunteers

A big thank you to all those who volunteered to staff our exhibit. There were 23 volunteers; many of them worked the exhibit for two or more shifts. The exhibit was very successful and beyond expectations.

The exhibit was at its best during the busy time of the day if there were two volunteers plus our Locavore. In the evening, without our Locavore, the exhibit was also at its best with two volunteers. Our staffing was at its best 60% of the time.

Locavore

Our Locavore was a hit. Eliane Delettre had an almost constant line-up waiting for the Trivia Wheel. The dress and hat were a big part of the attraction. The dress was designed and sewn by costume designer, Adelle Gaudet (profile of Adelle Gaudet on Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1618956/>).



Lots of pictures were taken of Eliane, and the Royal made it a point to send the media to our exhibit to get footage and pictures of our Locavore. On the first Saturday, there were back-to-back TV crews taking pictures and interviewing Eliane. The best footage was of one of the TV hosts participating in Farming Trivia.

All ages participated in Farming Trivia. It was normal for whole crowds to be listening to the questions as the younger members of the group mused over farming trivia. Often there were crowds waiting for a turn.

The Farming Trivia questions changed in the early going so that we had an "easy" or fun question for each of the 20 numbers on the Trivia Wheel and a more challenging one for teens and older

Volunteer: "I met some very nice people and shared some interesting dialogue. I had several people who live in Scarborough remarking that there is nowhere close for them to go to get local food. Apparently there used to be a farmers market in the city but there was not sufficient parking for the area that was used to house it and it wasn't successful as a result.

Visitor: "Do you have recipes?"

Volunteer: "Several people last night who were from small towns commented on the efforts that their local Sobeyes stores are making to sell local produce. They said it isn't integrated into the produce section, but set out separately and clearly identified as local. Nobody mentioned that about any other chain."

Visitor: "Please send a photo of the "harvest" costume."

Volunteer: "Discussions mainly centered around the need for more labeling in grocery stores--clarity on the "Product of Canada" label on packaged goods, more information than "Product of Canada" or "Product of Ontario" on produce."

Visitor: "Will you come to the Woodbridge Fair?"

Volunteer: "The exhibit was great, the wheel was a really good attraction for students and people of all ages (great idea). Most of the questions asked, I

visitors. Number 20 became favourite question:

How much milk does an average cow produce in one day?

- a. *Enough to fill a medium-sized milk carton.*
- b. *Enough to fill a big milk carton.*
- c. *Enough to fill a shelf in your fridge with cartons of milk.*
- d. *Enough to fill an Olympic swimming pool.*

We spun the Trivia Wheel many more times than originally estimated. The initial order of 5,000 buttons was all gone some time on Thursday, November 8. A new printing arrived on Friday.

A number of the questions directed the Trivia players to study our GTA map of where to find locally grown food. That helped our literature "walk off the table."

The amount of literature about locally grown food distributed was much greater than expected. Additional supplies of brochures were obtained from Durham, Peel, Halton and Toronto. Even those additional supplies from Halton and Toronto did not last to the end of the Fair.



Surveys and Sign Ups

Very few visitors, when asked, declined our survey. There were no criticisms about the length of the survey or its content. There was one person who criticized its presentation: "Those six questions did not need such a big piece of paper."

The fourth question on the survey caused many to pause: "*Do you buy food based on price more than you buy food based on where it is grown or raised?*" Quite a few visitors wanted something other than a Yes or No answer. It depends. A tally of the survey will follow as a separate report.

The number of surveys completed surpassed expectations. Before the event, we advised our "volunteers" that they could expect to tabulate about 100 surveys per day (total 1,000 for the Fair). This guesstimate was based on past experience with surveys at exhibits at the Outdoor Farm Show, Canadian International Farm Equipment Show and the International Plowing Match. At those events, 70 to 80 surveys per day was a good day. Since days at the Royal are longer, we guesstimated 100 per day at the Royal. On some days, 200 surveys were completed and our total is well on the way to 2,000.



A significant number of visitors signed up for our distribution lists even though volunteer staff seldom had time to promote these lists. The Trivia Wheel, maps and surveys took precedence.

There were 116 sign ups for the Discover Local Food List.

There were 80 sign ups for the Local Food Idea List.

was able to answer reasonably well. Maps were definitely a hit, by the end of the day we ran out of Halton Farm Fresh Brochures."

Visitor: (caterer): "Where do I find more Ontario cheeses for an Ontario cheese table?"

Volunteer: "It doesn't look like anything's going to last until the end on Sunday. For sure there's no lack of enthusiasm about playing the game and filling out the survey! We had one stretch of half an hour last night that was all adults at the game."

Visitor: (recent immigrant from Columbia): "How do I get a job in agriculture?"

Volunteer: "Thanks for the opportunity to work with you on this; it was an interesting project and a good change of pace."

Visitors: (Delegation of four from the Canadian National Exhibition): "Please come to the CNE."

Volunteer: I wanted to extend my congratulations to you and the other organizers of the RAWF display as this is one of the busiest booths at the fair! When I was there yesterday, kids, teen and adults gathered in large groups around our costumed lady who had them spellbound. Someone should get some photos! There was a lot of interest in the farm & farmers market brochures as well. Thanks for a remarkably successful effort."

Sustainable Agriculture on TRCA Land

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority is drafting a policy statement on "Sustainable Agriculture on TRCA Land." It has the potential to fundamentally change the TRCA's involvement in agriculture.

Agriculture is ongoing on TRCA lands. However, agriculture has always been regarded as an interim use; to be reforested sometime in the future or used for some other purpose.

The new policy proposes long-term agriculture, using sustainable farm practices, developing partnerships that contribute to locally grown food and making available innovative educational programming focused on sustainable agriculture.

GTA AAC is supportive of the initiative and has provided comments on the draft policy, including:

- Sustainable agriculture is possible with and without the use of chemical fertilizers.
- Sustainable farming practices are best enabled by a continuous improvement approach based on beneficial management practices. BMPs are usually enabled by an incentive/education approach rather than a monitoring/compliance approach.
- TRCA has an opportunity to test and pilot an innovative policy, "the production of specific environmental goods and services as part of the payment for the use of the lands." TRCA's primary activities relate to environmental goods and services. There are approaches to farming that will protect and enhance those environmental goods and services and entrepreneurs willing to make those choices should receive compensation for these efforts.

TRCA owns at least 54 agricultural properties, totaling almost 3,000 acres and made up predominantly prime agricultural land. Generally the land is rented to conventional farm enterprises producing corn, soybean and hay and includes a few livestock operations.

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GTA Agricultural Profile

The GTA Agricultural Action Committee is developing a Request for Proposals for an update of the GTA Agricultural Profile. A Working Group of regional planners and economic developers is reviewing the draft RFP. The objectives of the RFP include:

- To describe the current status of the business of farming, including its resources, infrastructure, environmental footprint, markets and value-added activities.
- Describe significant changes in the status of farming, including its resources, infrastructure, environmental footprint, markets and value-added activities during the past two decades.
- Describe in which ways farming in the GTA is different from farming elsewhere in the Ontario
- Determine the economic and job impact of farming in GTA.
- To inform decisions about the future of agriculture in GTA.
- To inform on the existing patterns of change for a future evaluation of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.

The first GTA Agricultural Profile was completed in 1999. It kick started the discussions that led to the development of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.

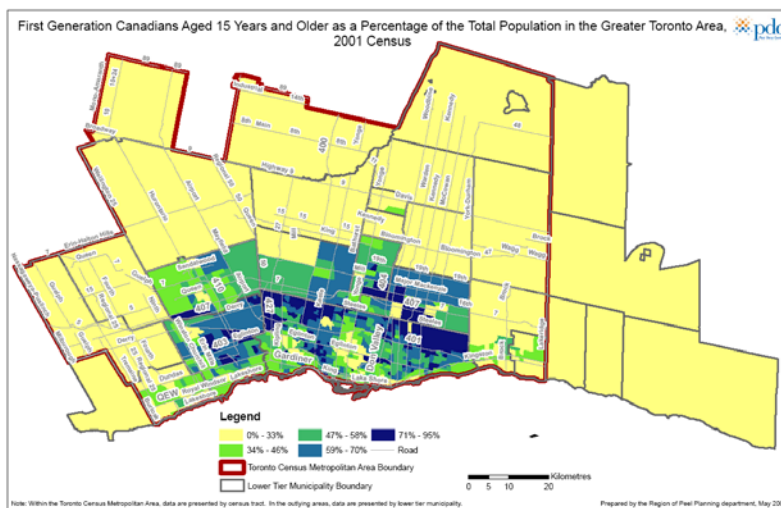
A Profile Update in 2003 was prepared for the final consultations on the Action Plan.

GTA Ethnic and Cultural Profile

The GTA Agricultural Action Committee is supporting the activities of various groups that are creating opportunities for beginning farmers, especially those with ethnic and culturally diverse backgrounds. There is a growing recognition that the ethnically and culturally diverse, GTA population represents a growing opportunity for near-urban agriculture. Similarly the aging farm population and the attractiveness of agriculture as a second career continues to drive change and creates new energies for revitalizing locally grown food.

A Working Group of GTA regional planners is analysing data from the 2006 census and creating a profile of the ethnic and cultural dynamic that now characterizes the GTA. Once this data has been turned into a profile of the GTA we will need to challenge researchers and entrepreneurs to explore what this means for the market for ethnic and culturally diverse food.

The Working Group has already drafted profiles from the 2001 census.



"There is a growing demand for ethnocultural crops, but it is all about understanding how much to grow, where, when and what varieties should be grown. Our market and production research is looking into how to coordinate the supply so farmers can cooperate and not overproduce." Bill Sciarappa, Rutgers Agricultural Extension Agent

Bill Sciarappa will be in Ontario on November 27 to 29 to speak in Durham Region, Toronto and Guelph.

For more information, including registration, full agenda, visit the conference website at: www.farmstart.ca/growininternational.

Toronto is Paying Attention to Locally Grown Food

At least two concrete initiatives to support locally grown food are underway in Toronto.

Toronto Health has commissioned a study on "The State of Toronto's Food." The purpose of this report is to provide background for a broader discussion about the development of a Toronto food strategy.

The second initiative is embedded in the city's Climate Change Action Plan. The adoption of that plan led to a Council resolution that has committed the city to a Good Neighbours Food Procurement policy for all departments, agencies, boards, commissions and any other institution the city funds.

"Establish in 2007 an Enviro-Food Working Group to promote local food production, increase community gardens, identify ways to remove barriers to the expansion of local markets that sell locally produced food and review the City's food purchasing policies."

Excerpt, Toronto Climate Change Action Plan

Capturing Local Food Opportunities

Interest in locally-grown and locally-processed food has been gaining momentum in the GTA and across Ontario. This growth in interest is most noticeable among consumers, culinary professional and institutions. But the momentum is likely to falter as the marketing structures and logistics of much of the food value chain (post harvest handling, the flow of food from seller to buyer) have not been designed with locally grown food in mind. The dominant system is designed to handle bulk, undifferentiated food from wherever.

Many farm entrepreneurs are interested in producing for the local market but do not have the time to participate in the traditional local food markets (farm shops, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, pick-your-own operations or direct delivery to restaurants and institutions). Many of them choose to focus on their strengths in land management and production and then sell into the bulk undifferentiated market.

The GTA Agricultural Action Committee is supporting the Ontario Rural Council in its efforts to create two forums for farmers, food retailers, direct marketers and associated stakeholders to examine the issues, opportunities and potential next steps related to supplying Ontario-grown produce and products to retail outlets.

"From the Earth's Floor to The Retail Store: Capturing Local Food Opportunities"

Port Perry on December 4
Scugog Community Centre
1655 Reach Street

Milton on December 6
Nassagaweya Community Centre
11264 Guelph Line

To Register Online:

www.torc.on.ca

Registration Fee: \$45

Youth Rate: \$25

The Ontario Food Terminal and Locally Grown Food

The GTA Agricultural Action Committee has identified the Ontario Food Terminal (OFT) as a potential significant contributor to the renewal of our locally grown food system. How, is not yet clear.

The Ontario Food Terminal is a successful wholesale market but it attracts mostly buyers interested in anonymous product. Some farmers have abandoned the OFT in order to benefit from branding their production with their farm reputation for the local food market.

The original Ontario Food Terminal Act expected the facility to include wholesale markets for dairy products, eggs, fish, honey, maple products and poultry.

The GTA AAC is planning a study of the Ontario Food Terminal's future place in locally grown food. Either the Terminal develops a significant role for locally grown food or alternative wholesale facilities are needed. Partners are needed complete this study.

Is the dominance of imported food at the Ontario Food Terminal caused by imports (70%) capturing the services of the facility or Ontario farmers and local food producers abandoning its services as no longer relevant or effective for their needs?

The GTA AAC Newsletter on near-urban agriculture and locally grown food is published by the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC) and distributed electronically.

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