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# The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

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To: Planning and Economic Development Committee  
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development  
Report: #2023-EDT-13  
Date: October 3, 2023

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**Subject:**

Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan Annual Report

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**Recommendation:**

That the Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

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**Report:**

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on the implementation of the Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan and the Local Food Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Action Plan.
- 1.2 This report will be accompanied by a staff presentation from Stacey Jibb, Manager of Agriculture and Rural Economic Development and Allison de Vos, Agriculture Economic Development Specialist.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Local Food BR+E Action Plan was introduced in 2019 to strengthen the local food value chain by identifying the opportunities, desires and limitations for food producers and suppliers.

- 2.2 The Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan (the Plan) was endorsed by Council in June of 2022 and sets out the Region's activities to grow and support Durham's agri-food businesses and the agri-food industry over a period of five years. As one of the top goods-producing industries in the region, agri-food offers a significant economic opportunity to create jobs and enable economic growth in all corners of the region.
- 2.3 Durham Region is home to 1,200 farms and 210,758 acres of agricultural lands, which is more than any other jurisdiction in the Greater Toronto Area. The Rural System comprises a majority of the region's land base, supporting the agri-food industry, and enabling farms and food businesses to thrive. The success of the agricultural sector is imperative to Durham's overall economic health.
- 2.4 When the Agri-Food Durham Plan was prepared in 2022, the Local Food BR+E Action Plan was incorporated into it. The activities within the Local Food BR+E Action Plan are now identified as one of the Goal Areas of the Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan, i.e., Goal 1: Retain and expand local food businesses. This report will identify activities supporting implementation of both the Agri-Food Plan and the previously stand-alone Local Food BR+E Action Plan.

### **3. Previous Reports and Decisions**

- 3.1 The Region of Durham Local Food Business Retention and Expansion Project Report and Action Plan was received by Planning and Economic Development Committee on June 4, 2019 ([#2019-EDT-11](#)).
- 3.2 The Growing Agri-Food Durham – A Five-Year Plan to Grow the Agri-Food Industry was received by Planning and Economic Development Committee on June 7, 2022 endorsed by Regional Council on June 29, 2022 ([#2022-EDT-10](#)).
- 3.3 The Local Food Business Retention and Expansion Project: Annual Implementation Update for 2022 was received by the Planning and Economic Development Committee on December 6, 2022 ([#2022-EDT-16](#)).

### **4. Implementation of the Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan**

- 4.1 The Agri-Food Plan is a five-year action-focused plan to guide the activities of the Agriculture and Rural Economic Development staff. It is task-oriented and benefits the agri-food industry while supporting agri-food partners/organizations across the region.

- 4.2 Over the last year, Economic Development and Tourism Division staff have worked in collaboration with partners such as the Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association, Durham Farm Connections, the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture, the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee and others to deliver several projects, initiatives and events that advance implementation of the Plan.
- 4.3 The list below highlights some of the key activities completed or underway to advance each of the ten goal areas identified within the Plan.

Goal 1: Retain and expand local food businesses.

- Business case and feasibility study completed to evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Durham Region Local Food Logistics Hub and Innovation Centre. Staff are currently exploring partnerships with local businesses and organizations to advance the actions identified within the study.
- Local Food Week campaign launches the first week of June each year to promote Ontario Local Food Week. This campaign includes updates to the [Invest Durham Local Food Directory](#), promotion of a farmers' market calendar, local food related blog posts and amplifying messages from partners such as the Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association.
- The 2022 Gates Open event took place on October 1 and 2, 2022. This successful event returned after a 2-year hiatus due to COVID-19. The goal of the event is to highlight Durham's vibrant local food businesses including agri-tourism operators and on-farm craft beverage producers. The event is organized jointly between the Economic Development and Tourism Division and the Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association.

Goal 2: Streamline regulations and approvals process for agri-food businesses.

- Agriculture Economic Development and Planning workshop held in June 2022 with a focus on creating strong working relationships between Economic Development, Planning and Building staff to effectively work together to support agri-food related businesses.

Goal 3: Enable and encourage agriculture related, on-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism uses.

- Best Practices for On-Farm Diversified Uses Report ([#2023-EDT-3](#)) shared with Planning Directors from Durham's eight area municipalities.

- ‘So You Think You Want To Farm’ and ‘So You Think You Want To Diversify’ multi-part webinar series were held in winter and spring 2022 to provide resources for startup farms or farms looking to diversify.

Goal 4: Advocate for infrastructure support.

- In July 2022, staff organized a tour for the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC) and Agricultural Advisory Committee of Clarington (AACC) to the Oshawa Port and the Hamilton Port to highlight the ongoing investments from the Hamilton Oshawa Port Authority (HOPA) that support the agri-food industry.
- Representatives from HOPA presented to DAAC in the Fall of 2022 to share further information about plans for infrastructure enhancement, including the expansion of grain handling capacity at the Oshawa grain terminal facilities.

Goal 5: Increase agri-food processing capacity in Durham Region.

- Through the Scugog Business Program, staff have conducted several interviews with food processing businesses to understand the challenges and opportunities facing this sector.

Goal 6: Identify opportunities and solutions for the workforce and labour shortages in the agri-food industry.

- Agri-food Workforce Development Video Series ([#2022-EDT-4](#)) launched in 2022 highlighting career opportunities in the agri-food industry and featuring local farm and business operators.
- Precision Agriculture Field Day ([#2023-EDT-10](#)) held in May 2023 where secondary school students visited a farm in Clarington to gain on-the-ground insights into the application of precision agriculture technologies and to explore the career opportunities related to this field of study.

Goal 7: Provide resources for aging and young farmers.

- In collaboration with BDO Canada, a virtual Succession Planning workshop was held in 2022 with content tailored specifically to agricultural businesses and farm families.

Goal 8: Partner with agricultural organizations to deliver and expand agricultural literacy in the region.

- Ongoing support is provided to Durham Farm Connections who delivers educational programming for farm and non-farm populations in Durham Region, including an in-person event focused on educating primary school students about where food comes from.
- In collaboration with DAAC, plans are underway to deliver Agriculture 101 presentations and training to municipal councils across the region. An Agriculture 101 presentation was delivered to Regional Council by the DAAC Chair in February 2023.

Goal 9: Enable and encourage a culture of innovation in agriculture.

- Vertical Farming 101 workshop series delivered in collaboration with York Region in 2022 focusing on topics that would benefit investors and business start-ups interested in the controlled environment agriculture space.
- Developed [precision agriculture videos](#) for secondary schools across Durham Region to use in the classroom for educational purposes in partnership with Durham Farm Connections.

Goal 10: Enhance urban agriculture.

- Ongoing partnership with Durham College and the Barrett Center for innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture, including support on a joint application to the Local Food Infrastructure Fund and establishing a temporary home for the Barrett Center on a Regionally owned site located in the Town of Ajax.

4.4 Successful implementation of the Agri-Food Plan relies on strong relationships between the Region and agri-food partners. As part of the consultation on the development of the Plan, a commitment was made to provide an annual report to agri-food partners to communicate activities underway or completed. Over the next several months, staff will attend meetings of Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association, Durham Region Federation of Agriculture, Durham Farm Fresh, DAAC and the AACC to share details related to the implementation of the Plan.

## 5. Ontario Agriculture Week and Gates Open 2023

- 5.1 The first full week of October marks Ontario Agriculture Week, which provides an opportunity to celebrate the more than 200 different food commodities grown in Ontario and the farmers who are pivotal to our local food production. Over the course of this week, the staff have prepared messaging to be shared across the Region's social channels celebrating agriculture and food production in Durham Region.
- 5.2 A campaign is underway for the month of October to celebrate the 30-year anniversary of Durham Farm Fresh. The campaign will encourage residents to gather at local farms. From apple picking to potato digging and pumpkin patches to wagon rides, this October, farms across Durham are offering reasons to gather with friends. This campaign will replace the activities of Gates Open in 2023 and will be delivered jointly with Durham Tourism, Invest Durham and the Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association supporting the messages. Visit [www.durhamtourism.ca/gather](http://www.durhamtourism.ca/gather)
- 5.3 The Durham Farm Connections [Celebrate Agriculture Gala](#) will be taking place on October 19, 2023. This event is an opportunity to celebrate farming in Durham Region. It features a local food showcase, farmers market style social and award presentations to honour farm families and individuals across Durham's agri-food community.

## 6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham region Strategic Plan:

### Goal 3: Economic Prosperity

- Item 3.5: Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries.

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan supports the growing of the agri-food industry in Durham, one of the priority clusters identified in Regional Economic Development Strategy ([Ready Set Future: A PLACE Blueprint for Durham](#)).

7.2 Plans are underway to support or launch several key initiatives that will continue to advance the agri-food industry. Activities include building capacity for agri-innovation and supporting agri-tech programming, enhancing relationships with agri-food processing businesses and launching an apple value chain project. In addition, Planning and Economic Development Department staff are in the initial stages of working with the Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock to identify opportunities for encouraging and enabling agriculture related and on-farm diversified uses collaboratively across north Durham.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE  
Commissioner of Planning and  
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

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Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair  
Chief Administrative Officer