



The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2022-EDT-16
Date: December 6, 2022

Subject:

Local Food Business Retention and Expansion Project: Annual Implementation Update

Recommendation:

That the Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on the implementation of the Durham Region Local Food Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Project which was received by the Planning and Economic Development Committee in June 2019.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Local Food BR+E Action Plan contains 42 actions to address the challenges and opportunities raised by the 64 businesses interviewed as part of the BR + E project. A copy of the 2019 Project Report is located at <https://www.durham.ca/en/economic-development/resources/Durham-Region-Local-Food-BRE-Final-report-EMAIL.pdf>
- 2.2 In addition to the 42 actions identified, 3 key recommendations emerged as goal areas on which to focus future efforts and resources:

- a. Regulations and approvals
 - Help businesses navigate regulations and layers of approvals.
 - Encourage and enable on-farm value added activities.
- b. Engagement and education
 - Build connections between businesses.
 - Improve consumer and producer understanding of local food.
 - Enhance promotion and marketing efforts on local food in Durham Region.
 - Improve the distribution system.
 - Attract a skilled workforce.
- c. Infrastructure support
 - Strengthen infrastructure.
 - Improve processing capabilities.
 - Establish viability of a year-round farmers' market.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 The Local Food BR+E Report was received by Committee on June 4, 2019 ([#2019-EDT-11](#)).
- 3.2 The Local Food Business Retention and Expansion Project: Annual Implementation Update for 2021 was received by Committee on October 5, 2021 ([#2021-EDT-6](#)).
- 3.3 The Growing Agri-Food Durham – A Five-Year Plan to Grow the Agri-Food Industry was received by Committee on June 7, 2022 ([#2022-EDT-10](#)).

4. Implementation of the Local Food BR+E Actions

- 4.1 Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increased demand for locally-produced food. This led many agri-food operators to refine their businesses practices and embrace digital technologies to keep up with consumer demand for online sales and safe outdoor food experiences.
- 4.2 At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Economic Development and Tourism Division staff undertook an exercise to identify and reprioritize the most urgent action items identified in the Local Food BR+E Final Report to effectively respond to the changing needs of the agri-food industry.

- 4.3 This exercise was repeated as part of workplan development throughout 2021 and 2022. Actions were reprioritized, and several ongoing activities continue based on the previous exercise. The action items are listed in Attachment 1.
- 4.4 The prioritized actions listed in Attachment 1 also support actions identified within the Growing Agri-Food Durham – Implementation Plan (the Plan). Goal 1 of the Plan states:
- a. Retain and expand local food businesses
 - Conduct an annual exercise to prioritize and implement actions within the Local Food BR+E Action Plan. This activity will correspond with an annual update report to the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee.
- 4.5 Key highlights of actions completed or underway from the Local Food BR+E Action Plan include:
- a. Delivery of a 4-part workshop series titled ‘Vertical Farming 101’ which received more than 400 registrants and provided information on the vertical farming sector for business start-ups, investors and organization interested in learning more the vertical farming industry and technical components of growing.
 - b. In collaboration with industry partners, several webinars/workshops were delivered over the course of the last year:
 - Succession Planning for Farms webinar – partnership with BDO Accountants (February 11, 2022)
 - Migrant Worker Information Session for Farm Operators (February 17, 2022)
 - So You Think You Want to Farm 2-part webinar series (March 4 and March 11, 2022)
 - Thinking of Diversifying Your Farm- 2 part-webinar series (March 25 and April 1, 2022)
 - Agriculture Economic Development and Planning workshop (June 9, 2022)
 - Port tours of Oshawa and Hamilton with the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee and the Clarington Agricultural Advisory Committee (July 21, 2022)
 - Durham Farm Fresh Social and Networking Event (August 9, 2022)

- 4.6 As part of Ontario Local Food Week (first week of June) and Ontario Agriculture Week (first week of October), robust campaigns were launched using Economic Development and Tourism digital channels to spotlight the agri-food sector and share resources on where to find local food across the Region.
- 4.7 Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Section staff have provided ongoing input to Envision Durham, the Region's municipal comprehensive review of the Durham Regional Official Plan. Input was recently provided throughout the development of the draft Agriculture System to ensure the Agri-Food Network was maintained.
- 4.8 A business case and feasibility study were completed to examine the potential for a Local Food Logistics Hub and Innovation Centre in Durham Region. A steering committee of local agri-food producers and industry partners was established to provide guidance during the completion of the study. Staff continue to work with partners, including Durham College, to move forward with next steps on the project ([2022-EDT-2](#)).
- 4.9 An agriculture and food workforce development project was completed in 2022 which included a series of videos for high school students in the grade 10 civics and careers programming, the videos are intended to highlight the diverse career opportunities available in the agri-food industry. A suite of resources was also developed for teachers to use in the classroom. The next phase of the project involves the development of curriculum for the Secondary High Skills Major Programming with a focus on agriculture technology (see report [2022-EDT-4](#)). The videos produced under this project are linked below:

[Farming video featuring Nature's Bounty Farm](#)

[Precision agriculture and agri-tech feature Korechi Innovations](#)

- 4.10 Invest Durham staff supported efforts to find a location for the Durham College Barrett Centre for Excellence in Sustainable Urban Agriculture and continue to collaborate on the creation of the new temporary facility on Regionally owned land in the Town of Ajax.
- 4.11 Staff have increased focus on and support of agricultural organizations in the region that identify local food as a mandate. These efforts have included participation with the DFFMA Board of Directors meetings, as well as organizing, participating in, and supplying a virtual meeting platform for Durham Farm Connections meetings.

- 4.12 Plans are underway for an Agri-Food Processing Business Retention and Expansion project to take place in 2023, the project will focus on increasing food processing capacity within the region and supporting food processing businesses to strengthen the local food system.
- 4.13 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.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

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

a. Goal 3: Economic Prosperity

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

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Durham Region Local Food BR+E project identifies high-value opportunities for the Region to support the growth of local food businesses. Given the changing landscape and local food system, action items continue to be reprioritized, and staff delivered projects and programming to respond to the evolving needs of businesses.
- 6.2 Staff will continue to deliver high value projects and programs from the Local Food BR+E project and support the growth and vibrancy of the Region's local food sector.
- 6.3 A copy of this report will be sent to the Durham Farm Fresh Marketing Association, the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee, Area Municipalities, all relevant partner organizations and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs as information.

7. Attachments

Attachment #1: Local Food Business Retention and Expansion Project – Prioritization Plan

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Local Food Business Retention and Expansion Project – Prioritization Plan

The [Durham Region Local Food Business Retention and Expansion \(BR+E\) Project](#) was completed and received by Planning and Economic Development Committee in June 2019. The Final Report and Action Plan contained 42 actions to address the challenges and opportunities raised by the 64 businesses interviewed as part of the project. An annual exercise is undertaken to prioritize the most urgent action items with 16 priority action items. The actions identified below are ones that will be prioritized for attention in 2023.

	Action
1	Work with Regional and municipal planning staff to include Economic Development staff as part of consultations around business proposals where appropriate.
2	Create a checklist that lays out processes and key departments that can be used as a 'one stop shop' resource for businesses.
3	Gather staff to review regional and municipal approaches to policy, regulations and approvals to identify best practices that should be adopted throughout the region. Consider by-laws for value-added agriculture development on farms and provide a development/permitting charge incentive or discount for agri-tourism.
4	Update the Regional Official Plan to include appropriate policy support for agriculture, agriculture related on-farm diversified uses.
6	Work with local tier municipal staff to establish consistent processes across municipalities for on-farm events (health department, planning approvals, by-law, emergency services) and develop communication.
7	Host education workshops on topics such as navigating regulations and gather input from businesses on reducing barriers to foster business growth in Durham Region.
8	Bring together players in the agri-food system at a Durham Local Food Showcase to foster connections, showcase innovation and enable access to tools to enhance the local food system.
9	Host education workshops on topics such as navigating regulations and gather input from businesses on reducing barriers to foster business growth in Durham Region.

	Action
10	Encourage businesses/chambers to adopt local food week and foster relationships between food service providers and local producers and food manufacturers.
11	Provide businesses with improved marketing skills and tools to promote their businesses through workshops and training sessions.
12	Collaborate with local chefs/restaurants and farms and direct farm markets to provide on-farm experiences that showcases local food.
13	Provide educators with immersed experience to build awareness of local food system workforce needs and connect to co-op and internship programs.
14	Research different models (such as online) to create a youth and young-adult mentoring program to match young entrepreneurs with experienced businesses in the agri-food sector.
15	Create a database/list of commercial kitchens in Durham Region (institutions, food service establishments, co-packing facilities) available for rent/lease.
16	Investigate deeper into the barriers for businesses to scale-up and provide tools, training or resources to address the barriers (such as food safety, minor processing, storage).