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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2024-INFO-85
Date: December 6, 2024

Subject:

Agri-Food Gateway Program

Recommendation:

Receive for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the delivery and progress of the Agri-Food Gateway Pilot Program.

2. Background

- 2.1 Durham Region is home to 3,360 agri-food businesses, including 1,200 farms. Approximately 27,000 people are employed by Durham's local agri-food value chain. Agri-Food is one of the Region's priority sectors, as identified in [Ready Set Future: A PLACE Blueprint for Durham](#).
- 2.2 The Canadian agri-food industry is experiencing labour shortages and is increasingly looking to technology to help reduce labour requirements. Many technology companies are unaware of the opportunities for their technologies to be adapted to solve challenges and provide solutions in the agriculture industry.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

3.1 [#2022-EDT-10](#) – Growing Agri-Food Durham – A Five-Year Plan to Grow the Agri-Food Industry. The Agri-Food Gateway Program directly address the following actions in the [plan](#):

- a. Goal 6: Identify opportunities and solutions for the workforce and labour shortages in the agri-food industry.
 - New Action: Connect and train businesses to address the agri-tech gap in the agriculture industry.
- b. Goal 8: Partner with organizations and agricultural organizations to deliver and expand agricultural literacy in the Region.
 - Action (d): Have an active role in educating non-farm communities (businesses) about agriculture in partnership with Durham Farm Connections.
- c. Goal 9: Enable and encourage a culture of innovation in agriculture.
 - Action (a): Build capacity for innovation partnerships with local post secondary and accelerator institutions.
 - Explore key partner relationship/partner development options for agri-tech innovation.

4. Program Overview

4.1 The Agri-Food Gateway Pilot Program was developed to provide small to medium sized technology companies with agricultural training to help them adapt their technologies to fill needs and gaps in the agri-tech and agriculture sector. Most companies are not aware of the opportunities to create technology for the agriculture sector, and often the tech companies have existing tech that could easily be modified to address business needs in agriculture. This program was created to address this challenge.

4.2 The program was a partnership between the National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC IRAP), Durham College and the Invest Durham Agriculture and Rural program. NRC IRAP provided the majority of the funding, Durham College administered and hosted the program, and Invest Durham sponsored the program, helped to develop the training workshops, organized farm tours, and coordinated the industry experts who acted as advisors to the participating companies.

- 4.3 Eight Canadian tech companies were accepted into the program. Five companies completed the training, and three of those companies are actively pursuing an agri-tech product offering. These three companies are currently receiving continued mentorship and support through the Agri-Food Gateway Program as they prototype their solutions. The technology companies that participated in the program are not based in Durham Region; however, this program provided the opportunity to showcase the Region and its vibrant innovation community to growing technology companies, and highlight the benefits of establishing a presence in the Region.
- 4.4 The program consisted of the following stages:
- a. An application process was opened to companies to demonstrate their capability to commercialize products or solutions.
 - b. Eight companies were selected for the program and a virtual meeting was held to introduce the program.
 - c. The training program consisted of four days of in-person learning in June 2024. The participants learned through classroom style training, industry panel discussions with Q&A, and tours of progressive farming operations who have experience with integrating new tech and management practices in their businesses.
 - d. Topics discussed in the training program included:
 - Orientation to Canadian Agriculture and Durham Agriculture
 - a) Challenges and opportunities
 - b) Size and scope of agriculture industry
 - c) Farming systems and types of production
 - d) Geographical overview
 - Speaker panel of farming experts regarding technology on the farm
 - Understanding and engaging farms as a technology business
 - Ontario Centre of Innovation (OCI) funding opportunities
 - Multiple networking opportunities
 - Tours of multiple Durham Region farms and Durham College's urban farms
 - One-on-one discussions with companies and experts
 - e. Following the training, the participants worked with Durham College and BioEnterprise for further support in creating their agri-tech prototypes. BioEnterprise is an organization which supports the acceleration and

development of agri-tech businesses across Canada. These activities are continuing presently.

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:

- 3.5: Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries: Agriculture and Agri-food are key drivers of our regional economy.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Agri-Food Gateway Program provided an opportunity for Canadian technology companies to learn about opportunities in agriculture and receive support with expanding their technology into the agri-food industry. By starting and hosting this program in Durham, we were able to connect the companies with resources, experts, and an enticing business landscape, and to promote Durham Region as an ideal place to do business.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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