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# The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

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To: Community Growth and Economic Development Committee  
From: Commissioner of Community Growth and Economic Development  
Report: #2025-EDT-3  
Date: February 4, 2025

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**Subject:**

Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan Annual Report

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**Recommendation:**

That the Community Growth 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.
- 1.2 This report will be accompanied by a staff presentation from Lori Talling, Acting Manager of Agriculture and Rural Economic Development, and Allison de Vos, Agriculture Economic Development Specialist.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan (the Plan) was endorsed by Council in June, 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.

- 2.2 When the 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.
- 2.3 According to the 2021 Census of Agriculture, Durham Region is home to 1,200 farms and 264,518 acres of agricultural lands, which is more than any other jurisdiction in the Greater Toronto Area. Durham's rural areas comprise a majority of the Region's land base, and the success of the agri-food industry is imperative to Durham's overall economic health.

### **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 and 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 Planning and Economic Development Committee on December 6, 2022 ([#2022-EDT-16](#)).
- 3.4 The Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan Annual Report was received by Planning and Economic Development Committee on October 3, 2023 ([#2023-EDT-13](#)).

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

- 4.1 The Plan is a five-year action-focused plan to guide the activities of the Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Section. It is task-oriented and benefits the agri-food industry while supporting agri-food partners/organizations across the region.
- 4.2 Since the last update provided in October 2023, Economic Development and Tourism Division staff have worked in collaboration with partners including the Durham Farm Fresh (DFF) Marketing Association, Durham Farm Connections (DFC), Durham Region Federation of Agriculture (DRFA), Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC), Durham College, National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC IRAP), and others to deliver several projects, initiatives and events prescribed in the Plan.

4.3 The list below highlights some of the key activities completed in 2024 or underway to advance each of the ten goal areas identified within the Plan.

a. Goal 1: Retain and expand local food businesses.

- An annual campaign to celebrate Local Food Week (June 3 to 9, 2024) included updates and promotion of the [Invest Durham Local Food Directory](#) and promotion of the DFF interactive map and a local food blog post.
- Posts to celebrate the harvest season and to encourage shopping for locally grown produce and farm-to-fork dining were shared during Ontario Agriculture Week (October 7 to 13).
- The Economic Development and Tourism Division executed the Gather at the Farm digital campaign ([#2025-EDT-2](#)) in collaboration with DFF, to promote agri-food and visiting local farms to residents and visitors during the month of October.

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

- Agriculture Economic Development and Planning Working Group tour of different types of agricultural businesses was held in March 2024 to provide the opportunity for learning and developing strong working relationships between Economic Development, Planning and Building staff across the region.
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) information and other resources (e.g. OFA Community of Practice Webinar) were shared with the Working Group during the year to encourage participation in learning opportunities related to agricultural development.
- The project to enable North Durham Agriculture-Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses (see project description in Goal 3 below) advances this goal area.
  - Community involvement in this policy review has been facilitated by creating a project information webpage and conducting a survey through the Your Durham community engagement platform and the hosting of a public open house. Community consultation on draft recommendations will continue in 2025.
  - It is anticipated that policy and process improvements will result in an improved application process and streamlined services for Agriculture-

Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses, assisting operators in overcoming barriers to business startup and expansion.

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

- A collaborative project between the Region of Durham's Community Growth and Economic Development Department and the Townships of Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock was initiated in 2023 to support and enable north Durham agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses. The objective is to provide an economic environment in north Durham that supports the ongoing viability of the agri-food industry through updated land-use policies and development approval processes that enable agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses as-of-right, while balancing farmland protection. A planning consultant, WSP Canada, was engaged in April 2024 to undertake a study and provide policy and process recommendations. Phase 4 (Consultation) is presently underway and scheduled to be complete by March 2025. Phase 5 (Final Recommendations Report), which will include presentations to the Community Growth and Economic Development Committee and to northern area municipal committees of Council, will take place in spring 2025.
- Staff presented the Enabling North Durham Agriculture-Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses project to other communities during an OFA/Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness Community of Practice webinar.

d. Goal 4: Advocate for infrastructure support.

- In 2024, staff supported the Hamilton Oshawa Port Authority (HOPA) by providing data to assist with grain and fertilizer expansion forecasting, connecting HOPA to industry contacts including the Chair of DAAC who hosted a tour of local agri-businesses for the Oshawa Port's General Manager, and participating in a Cross-Lake Ontario truck ferry research project undertaken by McMaster University.
- HOPA presented an update on the Port of Oshawa Grain Export Terminal to DAAC in October 2024.

- e. Goal 5: Increase agri-food processing capacity in Durham Region.
- Staff began to explore the opportunity to attract an abattoir investment to the region. This will continue in 2025.
  - Student career tours being organized for March and April 2025 will include a meat cutting culinary tour. This is a trade that is experiencing major labour shortages. The tour will help encourage culinary students to consider a career path in meat cutting.
- f. Goal 6: Identify opportunities and solutions for the workforce and labour shortages in the agri-food industry.
- The second Precision Agriculture Field Day ([#2024-INFO-75](#)) was hosted in partnership with DFC in May 2024 where over 100 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 variety of career opportunities in agriculture.
  - The [Soybean harvest video](#) was developed and added to the Precision Agriculture video series. All five videos were shared with teachers and students prior to the Precision Agriculture Field Day and will be used as a future educational resource.
  - Staff exhibited at the CBOT Student/Employer Summit to showcase the opportunities to work in agriculture to high school students.
  - Culinary/meat cutting and agriculture mechanics career tours were organized for high school students are being organized for March 2025 to increase awareness of these career opportunities.
- g. Goal 7: Provide resources for aging and young farmers.
- A Durham Agriculture Leadership Program was developed to provide farmers with the opportunity to grow their interpersonal, business, and leadership skills. The program is a four-part series covering important topics in agriculture leadership starting in January 2025 and running once monthly until April. The program includes an evening session entitled "Finding fairness in farm transition" that will provide farmers with succession planning resources.

- h. Goal 8: Partner with agricultural organizations to deliver and expand agricultural literacy in the region.
- Ongoing support is provided to DFC who deliver educational programming for farm and non-farm populations in Durham Region, including an in-person event to educate primary school students about where food comes from and a community open house.
  - Staff supported DFF/DFC Shared Coordinator workplan development and activities.
  - Staff assisted DAAC with preparation of presentation materials for their f Agriculture 101 presentations and training to area municipal councils across the region between 2023 and 2024.
  - Staff collaborated with DFC to develop apple value chain video series and educational campaign ([#2024-EDT-15](#)), "From Farm to Plate: Journey of the Durham Region Apple," to increase public awareness of the food supply chains in Durham Region. The videos will also be used to educate and generate student interest in agri-food career opportunities, in support of efforts to address labour shortages in the industry being addressed under Goal 6.
  - Economic Development and Tourism staff supported planning and delivery of the annual DAAC Farm Tour held in September 2024.
  - Agri-food focused economic factsheets for municipalities are being developed. The factsheet for Uxbridge was prepared in 2024 and factsheets for other municipalities will be completed in 2025.
- i. Goal 9: Enable and encourage a culture of innovation in agriculture.
- The Agri-Food Gateway Pilot Program ([#2024-INFO-85](#)) was developed and delivered 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 agri-food industry. This program was a partnership between NRC IRAP, Durham College and the Economic Development and Tourism Agriculture and Rural program. Five companies completed the training, and three of those companies are actively pursuing an agri-tech product offering. Continuation of the program in 2025 is being explored.

- j. Goal 10: Enhance urban agriculture.
- The Region advanced its partnership with Barrett Centre for Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture including participation on an urban agriculture advisory committee.
  - Staff collaborated with the Barrett Centre to host an on-farm culinary demonstration with Chef Alex Page, a local food advocate, as part of the broader Gather at the Farm marketing campaign. Approximately 150 attendees learned about urban agriculture and the opportunities for cooking with local ingredients.
  - Staff advised and reviewed the Durham Food System Report Card 2024 issued by the Durham Food Policy Council (DFC) which included urban agriculture recommendations.

4.4 Successful implementation of the Agri-Food Plan relies on strong relationships between the Region and agri-food partners. Between January and March 2025, staff are attending meetings of DFC, DFF, DRFA, DAAC and the Agricultural Advisory Committee of Clarington to share details related to the implementation of the Plan.

## **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 Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan supports and enables growth and economic prosperity 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](#)).

6.2 Plans are underway to support, advance, or launch several key initiatives that will continue to advance Goals of the Plan. Areas of focus include supporting implementation of policy and process improvements to enable agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses across north Durham, delivering the Agriculture Leadership Program, activities to support increasing agri-food processing capacity, and activities to address workforce and labour shortages in the agri-food industry.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE  
Commissioner of Community Growth and  
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

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Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair  
Chief Administrative Officer