ONTARIO Culinary Tourism ALLIANCE

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF HALTON

AGRITOURISM ACTION PLAN

DEVELOPED BY: THE ONTARIO CULINARY TOURISM ALLIANCE

JULY 2013

Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

2. BACKGROUND 15

3. INTRODUCTION 17

4. AGRITOURISM OVERVIEW 21

5. FOOD TOURISM OVERVIEW 33

6. EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT & SWOT ANALYSIS 41

7. OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS 53

8A. LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN 67

8B. ENHANCING THE SIMPLY LOCAL PROGRAM 81

8C. DEVELOPING A SEASONAL PUMPKIN TRAIL 95

8D. HARVEST HALTON EVENT 109

8E. PICNIC PROGRAM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING CAMPAIGN 127

8F. FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING 131

REFERENCES 143

APPENDIX ATT.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Agritourism Action Plan was undertaken with the dual purpose of supporting Halton Region's agricultural sector and attracting more visitors to Halton through agri and food tourism development. These objectives are identified within Halton Region's *2011-2014 Citizen's Priorities Action Plan* and the *Economic Development Strategic Implementation Plan 2012-2021*. The intention of this Action Plan is to provide direction for Halton Region's priorities in agritourism development and service delivery.

The completed Action Plan presented in this report provides Halton Region with recommended tactics to attract more visitors to Halton by working with partners and stakeholders to enhance existing agri and food tourism offerings, develop new agri and food tourism products, programs and experiences and most importantly, contribute to the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector in the region.

These recommendations were developed following several interviews and workshops with Halton agri and food tourism stakeholders, an extensive evaluation of the market readiness of existing agri and food tourism businesses in Halton and a review of best practice initiatives in leading agri and food tourism destinations in Ontario and internationally.

This report also highlights the policies, regulations and issues affecting the successful development of agritourism in Halton Region. Related, regional and provincial action plans currently in place have also been identified. These include the *Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021* and the *2005 Provincial Policy Statement*.

Further, the research and recommendations included in this report will contribute to the forthcoming *Rural Agricultural Strategy* and ultimately, the execution of Halton Region's *Economic Development Strategic Implementation Plan: 2012-2021*.

Defining Agritourism

Throughout this report, agritourism refers to the economic activity that occurs when people link travel with agricultural products, services or experiences. This encompasses all activities and attractions that connect tourists to a working farm or other agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation (including ranches). Agricultural fairs, farmers' markets, events with an agricultural theme and on-farm accommodations are also included in this category.

This report also takes into account the numerous other channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products. These "off-farm" channels, including restaurants, retailers, accommodations and attractions are referred to throughout the report as food tourism.

Overall, the categories of businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain considered in this report are as follows:

- Accommodations

- Attractions
- Equine Experiences
- Culinary Schools
- Farms, Orchards, Pastures and Artisans
- Farmers' Markets
- Festivals
- Restaurants
- Retailers (with local food and/or drink offerings)
- Wineries, Breweries, Cideries and Distilleries

At the heart of any authentic food experience is agriculture. Providing opportunities for tourists to experience a destination's agricultural products, or "tastes of place", creates strong connections to the farming community and allows the agricultural story of the destination to shine. Agritourism is a powerful economic driver that provides farmers with opportunities for diversification and new revenue streams, while promoting economic development within the region.

Halton Region Agri & Food Tourism Experience Assessment & SWOT Analysis

This report contains a detailed agri and food tourism inventory assessment created using the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance's (OCTA) proprietary Experience Assessment Tool (EAT™). EAT™ considers more than 50 elements to assess whether a business offers a market ready, authentic agri and/or food tourism experience that will meet the expectations of agri and food tourists. Elements considered in the assessment include way-finding details, web and social media presence, breadth and accessibility of experience and, most importantly, commitment to local sourcing. For the purposes of this report, "local" was defined as "from Ontario". It was also noted when products were sourced directly from Halton Region.

Each of the more than 400 agri and food tourism businesses assessed in Halton Region has been assigned both a numerical rating of market readiness and a qualitative rating of "*Champion*", "*Leader*", "*Follower*" or "*Subscriber*". This detailed assessment is complemented with both a region-wide and category specific analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

Market Readiness Ratings

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *"Champion"*

"*Champion*" rated businesses are operating at a world-class agri and/or food tourism level. They offer a depth and authenticity of experience that is a unique reflection of the region's agricultural identity. Local agri and/or food tourism *"champions"* offer experiences that could compete with the very best agritourism experiences in the world and demonstrate a significant commitment to local food and drink.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *" Leader"*

Businesses achieving a market ready rating of "*leader*" offer a depth and authenticity of experience that is a unique reflection of the region's agricultural identity. Local agri and/or food tourism *"leaders"* offer experiences with considerable breadth and have a

demonstrated commitment to local food and drink. Although offering high quality experiences, leader-rated businesses are missing one or two of the *"champion"* rating criteria and lack recognition on a larger scale.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *"Follower"*

"*Follower*" rated businesses show some commitment to offering visitors an authentic regional experience. They often promote their local food and drink offerings but are not consistently strong in all areas and may not have developed an experience beyond their core offering.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *"Subscriber"*

Businesses at the "*subscriber*" level offer a very limited authentic expression of the region. They may just be starting to offer local food and/or drink or demonstrate only a marginal amount of local sourcing (e.g. have begun featuring VQA wines on their wine list). This category also encompasses businesses that may be growing/sourcing an extensive number of products but have very low visibility to tourists and poor web presence.

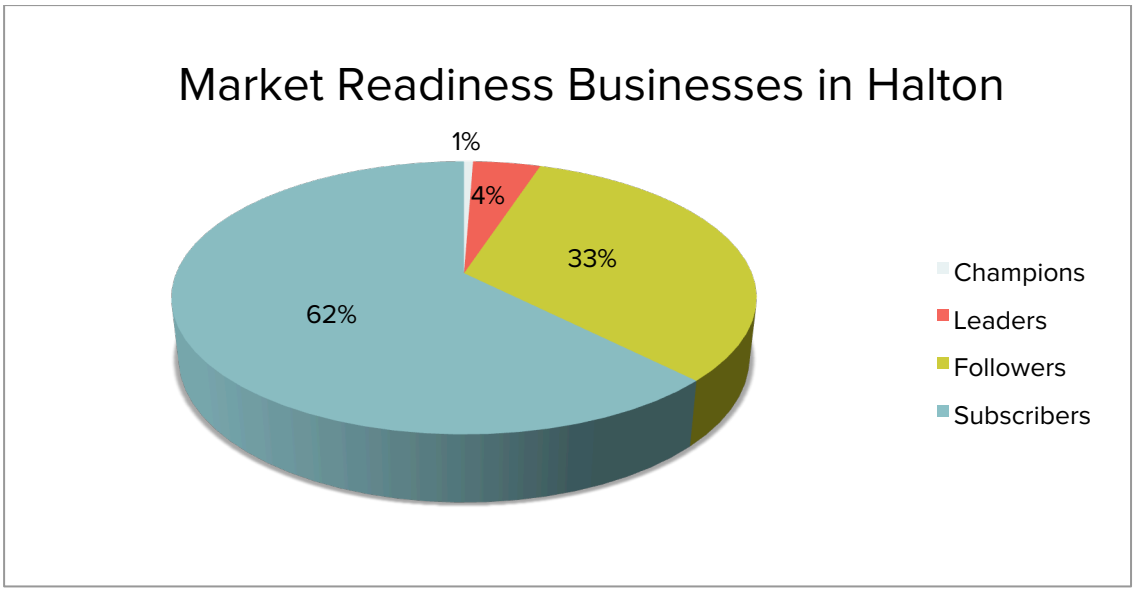
Products and experiences that are market ready are referred to as "*champions*" and "*leaders*" and have been highlighted as opportunities for immediate inclusion in regional product and program development. Businesses that have some degree of authentic agri and/or food tourism offerings but are not currently delivering on the expectations of an agri and/or food tourist have received a rating of "*follower*" or "*subscriber*".

Note: For a more detailed breakdown of market readiness by business category, please refer to Appendix F.

Results: Agri and Food Tourism in Halton Region

Of the 441 Halton-based agri and food tourism value chain businesses assessed, 338 were found to show at least a preliminary commitment to sourcing local food. However, only 17 of these businesses received a market ready rating of either "*champion*" (2) or "*leader*" (15). Of these market ready businesses, only a small portion was sourcing directly from within Halton.

The fact that over 75 per cent of businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain are showing at least a marginal commitment to sourcing locally is extremely encouraging. The results of the assessment and complementary SWOT analyses also highlight particular areas of focus for Halton Region to offer educational opportunities and support to "*followers*" and "*subscribers*". Engaging and educating these businesses will serve to raise the overall quality and market readiness of agri and food tourism businesses throughout the region.



Promotion of local sourcing is one such area for improvement. Of the agri and food tourism businesses in the inventory, over 30% of businesses sourcing locally were not highlighting this fact. Without effective labelling and promotion, a potential tourist will have difficulty determining whether local sourcing exists and may instead choose another business with clearly identified local food and drink offerings. Opportunities to improve this and other identified challenges impacting market readiness are highlighted below and described further in Chapters 7 and 8.

It was identified several times throughout the course of this project that gaps in the local food supply chain, specifically between farmers and local chefs, are a significant challenge. The local food supply chain must be strengthened to ensure the success of agri and food tourism in Halton. There is a significant opportunity for the Region to play a role in this process. Recommended tactics are highlighted below and described in further detail in Chapter 8.

Of the 441 listings in the inventory, 103 of these businesses were found to have no local food or drink sourcing. These businesses were in the accommodations, festivals/events and attractions categories. These businesses were not given a rating but have been included in the inventory to identify gaps and opportunities for showcasing authentic regional tastes and experiences.

While there are several opportunities and recommendations for the Region to focus on strengthening the foundation required to become a strong agri and food tourism destination, opportunities also exist to leverage inherent strengths and existing market ready (and near market ready) businesses in the short term. A number of product development recommendations have been identified and are highlighted below. Detailed recommendations for the successful execution of these products are provided in Chapter 8.

SWOT Analysis: Regional Perspective

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Four season destination • Location (Easily accessible) • Affluent local demographics • Natural assets • Existing tourism infrastructure • Engaged, collaborative stakeholders • Strong VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) market • First appointment of Agricultural Liaison Officer position in 2013	• Limited businesses offering authentic "tastes of place" • Local food supply chain • Location (Competition) • Accommodations • Below provincial average for daily and overnight spend • Fragmentation of rural/urban areas • Resource awareness and connectivity • Lack of branding
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• Strengthen local food supply chain • Expand *Simply Local* program • Business Development • Expand equine offering • Package multi-experience activities • Establish Halton as a picnic destination • Support/assist product development • Increase local food/drink offerings at attractions, festivals, accommodations • Increase number of businesses offering authentic "tastes of place" • RBC Canadian Open, Epic Tour Halton, Pan Am Games • Increase promotion of Halton as a Four Season destination	• Residential growth and conversion pressure • Regulatory barriers and over-regulation of farmland • Out of region agricultural incentives • Aging farming population and succession planning • Competition from other destinations • Long term viability of Mohawk Racetrack and equestrian events • Decline in bed and breakfast accommodations

Note: Category specific SWOT analyses are provided in Appendix F.

Opportunities & Recommendations

The agri and food tourism inventory assessment and SWOT analyses in conjunction with best practice reviews, and stakeholder interviews and workshops have identified a number of opportunities for enhancing Halton's agritourism sector.

Additionally, a review of related policy issues has been included. While providing recommendations to address specific policy issues is outside of the scope for the purposes of this Action Plan, it is suggested that these issues be further addressed as part of the *Rural Agricultural Strategy* and/or through continued participation with the *Greater Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021* (see Chapter 4).

This report has prioritized those opportunities that are (1) fundamental for building a sustainable agri and food tourism foundation and (2) have the ability to enhance and improve Halton's agri and food tourism offerings in the short to medium term.

Recommendations fall under three main categories:

1. Educate & Engage
2. Fundamental Product Development
3. Enhanced Product Development

EDUCATE & ENGAGE

Fundamental to successful destination and product development are engagement, and education. For Halton in particular, engagement and education are required to:

- Improve the local food supply chain to increase the number of channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products
- Increase the number of "market ready" agri and food tourism businesses and products
- Encourage product development and packaging with market ready businesses

It is recommended that the Region take a leading role in engaging and educating agri and food tourism stakeholders in support of the above objectives by offering a series of networking events, seminars, toolkits and resources. While engagement and education is an ongoing effort, it is recommended that the Region place particular importance on this initiative in Year 1 to help lay the foundation for ongoing successful product development.

Specifically, the following activities are recommended in support of the above objectives. Additional details around the recommended activities are provided through Chapters 7 and 8.

Tactic #1: Facilitate Direct Procurement Partnerships (DPPs) between Farmers and Chefs (See Chapter 8a)

a) Farmer-Chef Networking Events and/or Local Food Tourism Summit

b) Workshop: Direct Procurement Partnerships (DPPs) for Producers

c) Workshop: Direct Procurement Partnerships (DPPs) for Restaurants

d) Explore, develop and implement tools and strategies to support DPPs, including: Online marketplaces, Web-based ordering systems, Local Food Distribution Co-operatives, Centralized venues, Regional aggregators

e) Facilitate the implementation of a Regional Food Hub Distribution Model (Conduct feasibility study via *Rural Agricultural Strategy*, work with Greenbelt Fund and Gordon Food Services)

Tactic #2: Facilitate (and/or promote) a series of educational seminars, workshops and toolkits for agri and food tourism value chain stakeholders to improve market-readiness (See Chapters 7 and 9)

a) *Agri and Food Tourism Value Chain Workshops & Tool Kits covering a number of topics, including:*
   - Experience Development -
   - Customer Service/Accessibility Standards
   - Local Food Marketing
   - General Marketing – Promotion, Social Media & Media Relations
   - Value-Adding

b) *Equestrian Sector Specific Workshops:*
   - Product Development/Packaging

c) *Farmer Specific Workshops & Tool Kits covering a number of topics, including;*
   - Agricultural Business Management
   - Risk Management & Liability
   - Accessibility

d) *Retail, Restaurant and Accommodation Specific Workshops:*
   - Customer Service
   - Promotion of Local Food
   - Sourcing Local Food

FUNDAMENTAL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

While the educational opportunities described above will help to increase the number of market ready agri and food tourism businesses, there is a significant opportunity for Halton Region to work with existing market ready and near market ready businesses to develop new agri and food tourism experiences by packaging products together.

New experience development requires a strong leader to engage stakeholders, develop a sustainable business plan, and coordinate execution and promotion. In some cases, leaders can come from the grass roots level with minimal facilitation required from the Region. In other cases, it is recommended that the Region take a leadership position at least until the experience is well developed with a successful couple of years in-market. At this point, control over the experience should be transferred to a leading stakeholder to allow the Region to focus on developing additional experiences.

The following tactic outlines immediate or near-term new product development opportunities for which it is recommended the region take on a leadership or strong facilitative role. Detailed recommendations for the successful execution of these products are provided in Chapter 8.

Tactic #3: Lead or facilitate the development, execution and/or promotion of five new experiences leveraging existing regional assets and market-ready businesses in the near-medium term to establish Halton as an agri and food tourism destination

a) Harvest Halton Event

Harvest Halton is a one-day signature culinary event in early October featuring local chefs and farmers at Country Heritage Park. The goals of the event were defined to celebrate the harvest season, highlight the food culture in the region, create local ambassadors and create buzz in the media and food community to attract visitors to the Region. The Event would have a connection to the Pumpkin Trail. It has been recommended that the Region of Halton take a leadership role in establishing and executing this event. See Chapter 8d for more information.

b) Pumpkin Trail

Designed to celebrate the pumpkin/harvest season in the Halton Region for the month of October, the Trail will attract visitors to the Region, encourage the promotion and sourcing of local Halton pumpkins and help to strengthen Halton's agri and food tourism offerings. It has been recommended that the Region play a leading role in the development and marketing of this tourism product. See Chapter 8c for more information.

c) Picnic Destination Product Development and Packaging

Opportunities exist to create picnic packages that will increase visitor spending and time in the region, strengthen connections between agri and food tourism business operators and promote the wealth of natural, outdoor attractions that Halton Region has to offer. It is recommended that the Region facilitate workshops and engage businesses along the local food supply chain (farms, retailers, restaurants, attractions and accommodations) to create partnerships and packages. See Chapters 8e and 9 for more information.

d) Four Season Destination Product Development and Packaging

Opportunities exist to create both seasonal and year-round packages that will promote the unique visitor experiences in the Region. As with the Picnic Destination, effective promotion and development of these products will increase visitor spending and time in the region, strengthen connections between agri and food tourism business operators and promote the wealth of natural, outdoor attractions in the area. It is recommended that the Region facilitate workshops and engage agri and food tourism businesses to create partnerships and packages. See Chapter 8f for more information.

e) Equestrian Product Development and Packaging

Through the inventory collection and SWOT analyses, significant opportunities to expand the agri and food tourism experience at equine businesses in the region were identified, as well as a list of best practices both within the province and internationally. It is recommended that Halton Region facilitate workshops and/or networking events to engage business operators from the equine industry. See Chapters 7, 9 and Appendix F for more information.

ENHANCED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

While the section above focuses on *new* product development, there is also an opportunity for Halton to lead or facilitate the improvement or enhancement of existing products to increase their relevance to agri and food tourists.

The following outlines key products for which an Enhanced Product Development opportunity exists. Detailed recommendations for the successful execution of these products are provided in Chapter 8.

Tactic #4: Enhance existing products to increase their relevance and appeal to agri and food tourists, specifically:

a) Enhance the existing *Simply Local* Program to include businesses along the agritourism value-chain, including; restaurants, accommodations, etc. See Chapter 8b for more information.

CONCLUSION

While there is a significant amount of work to be done to both (1) ensure a sustainable agri and food tourism foundation is built and (2) develop and enhance tourist-ready products, the Region's strong agricultural community and engaged group of stakeholders have displayed the passion and commitment necessary to be successful.

The momentum created by these dynamic stakeholders should be leveraged and it has been recommended that Halton Region play an active role to support the initiatives that are currently in development.

From expansive conservation areas and waterfront trails to the scenic countryside with its strong agricultural heritage and stunning backdrop, Halton Region has a wide range of natural and agricultural assets to entice visitors year-round. With upwards of six million people located within a three-hour drive of the Region, there is a significant neighbouring market for the Region to capture. Opportunities to capture this market exist through the development of quality agri and food tourism products and experiences. The efforts already undertaken by the Region and a diverse, empowered group of stakeholders speaks to this dedication to growth.

It is the hope of OCTA that the opportunities and recommendations identified in this Agritourism Action Plan will contribute to the sustainability of a vibrant agricultural sector and attract more visitors to Halton Region for years to come.

2. BACKGROUND

Purpose

The Agritourism Action Plan was undertaken with the dual purpose of supporting Halton Region's agricultural sector and attracting more visitors to Halton through agri and food tourism development. These objectives are identified within both Halton Region's *2011-2014 Citizen's Priorities Action Plan* and the *Economic Development Strategic Implementation Plan 2012-2021*. The intention of this Action Plan is to provide direction for Halton Region's priorities in agritourism development and service delivery.

Context

There has been a significant decline in Halton farms and farming sectors. Between 2001 and 2011, the dairy industry in Halton experienced a 55.6% reduction, while the number of beef cattle operations fell off sharply by 71.9%, according to the Census of Agriculture (Statistics Canada). The number of poultry, vegetable, sheep, goat, horse, oilseed, fruit, tree nut, nurseries and hay operations have also decreased.

Residential growth targets, such as those outlined in the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* implemented in 2006, continue to put pressure on the region's agricultural spaces. As the real estate market inflates prices, new farmers looking to buy land often choose to start farming in regions with lower land prices. In some cases, other regions provide incentives to attract these new farmers, which can be seen as a direct threat to Halton's farming future.

The *Halton Region Official Plan* (2006) includes a number of objectives for the Agricultural Rural Area to address the challenges outlined above. Specifically related the Action Plan, the *Halton Region Official Plan* states it is the policy (101) of the Region:

(2) to recognize, encourage and protect agriculture as an important industry in Halton and as the primary long-term activity and land use throughout the rural area, and to this end:
   a. Support and develop plans that promote agriculture

(4) Recognize, encourage, protect and support Halton's farmers and agricultural operations, and to this end:
   g. Introduce programs that will encourage visitors to experience and understand agricultural operations in Halton
   h. Support a farm-fresh produce network that promotes direct sales of farm produce and related products to residents, local businesses and visitors

Agritourism Action Plan Objectives

- Strengthen the future of agriculture in Halton through agri and food tourism development
- Provide direction and prioritization for Halton Region's agritourism development and service deliverables

- Develop an agri and food tourism initiative to attract tourists to Halton's rural areas
- Establish an agritourism program that emphasizes educational and recreational components of agricultural tourist activities
- Increase the number of channels and experiences for residents and visitors to connect with Halton's agricultural products and services
- Increase the number of agricultural value chain businesses delivering authentic Halton Region experiences and local food to residents and visitors
- Enhance and improve existing agritourism offerings through packaging, promotion and local food
- Increase farm revenues

RURAL AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY (RAS)

Concurrent with the Agritourism Action Plan, Halton Region's Planning Services Division is in the process of developing a *Rural Agricultural Strategy* (RAS) that will support the long-term sustainability of the rural economy as per the *Halton Regional Official Plan* policies and objectives. Understanding the broader issues facing the agricultural sector will allow Halton Region to effectively enhance, leverage and promote agritourism opportunities in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Recommendations and opportunities identified within this report are intended to support the forthcoming *Rural Agricultural Strategy*.

3. INTRODUCTION

The Agritourism Action Plan was compiled in four phases:

1) Review of Current Agritourism Initiatives and Background Material
2) Agri and Food Tourism Business Inventory Assessment and Mapping
3) Stakeholder Consultations
4) Final Report (identification/recommendations of potential product development)

Phase 1: Review of Current Agritourism Initiatives and Background Material

A general overview of the current state of the agri and food tourism industries, policies and regulations, development trends and opportunities for growth in Halton Region were identified. In addition, best practices in agri and food tourism across Ontario and internationally were reviewed and considered along with available research and trends on the demographics, preferred activities and motivations of agri and food tourists. Key strategic issues were prioritized and addressed during stakeholder sessions, industry interviews and in the Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

Phase 2: Agri and Food Tourism Business Inventory Assessment and Mapping

In order to provide a regional perspective of agri and food tourism offerings in Halton, regional databases and extensive online research were employed to compile an agri and food tourism inventory. Relevant businesses were entered into a database using the Experience Assessment Tool (EAT™) and assigned a rating based on their experiences and market readiness. EAT™ is a proprietary tool developed by the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA) that provides the client with a geo-mapped database and enhanced internal research capabilities as well as a consumer-facing map with search functionality.

A complete overview of the EAT™ process and inventory is outlined in Chapter 6: Experience Assessment and SWOT Analysis.

The inventory list included all businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain in Halton Region that offer agricultural products and/or authentic agri and food tourism experiences. These businesses included:

- Accommodations
- Attractions
- Equine Experiences
- Culinary Schools
- Farms, Orchards, Pastures and Food Artisans
- Farmers' Markets
- Festivals
- Restaurants
- Retailers (with local food and/or drink offerings)
- Wineries, Breweries, Cideries and Distilleries

Accommodations, attractions, equine experiences and festivals without agri and/or

food tourism components were included to identify potential opportunities for this type of development.

Phase 3: Stakeholder Consultations

Recognizing that contributions from the stakeholder groups are required to deliver successful agri and food tourism development, the goal of these consultations was to inform, educate and facilitate discussion between interested parties. Opportunities and gaps identified by stakeholders during these sessions were used to inform the SWOT analysis.

Phase 4: The Final Report

The Agritourism Action Plan incorporates the first three phases (background review, inventory assessment and stakeholder consultants) to provide Halton Region with recommended tactics to attract more visitors to Halton by working with partners and stakeholders to enhance existing agri and food tourism offerings, develop new agri and food tourism products, programs and experiences and most importantly, contribute to the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector in the region.

Agritourism Action Plan: Work Schedule

	January	February	March	April	May	June
Phase 1: Background Review						
Best Practice Review						
Policy & Regulation						
Phase 2: Inventory Assessment						
SWOT Analysis						
Phase 3: Stakeholder Sessions						
Phase 4: Final Report						

Research Methodology

A wide variety of resources were used to compile data for this report. Information sources included:

- Halton databases (*Simply Local* guide, Food Locations in Halton, Burlington Restaurant Listings)
- Extensive online inventory and individual business listing research
- *Halton Region Annual Tourism Overview* (2013)
- *Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming: An Action Plan* (2021)
- *Halton Region Economic Development Strategic Implementation Plan* (2011)
- *Halton Region Official Plan* (2006)

- Statistics Canada: *Census of Agriculture* (2011)
- *Sustainable Halton: Agricultural Countryside Vision* (2007, 2009)
- *Premiere Ranked Tourist Destination Final Report* (2007)
- *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (2006)
- Statistics Canada: *Travel and Motivation Survey* (2006)
- Sustain Ontario: *Policies from the Field* papers
- Agri and Food Tourism Stakeholder SWOT Session
- Global best practice reports
- Industry interviews
- In-market research
- Agri and food tourism articles, publications and industry reports

All research was conducted between mid-January and April 30, 2013 and was current as of those dates.

Additional resources are provided in the References section of this report.

4. AGRITOURISM OVERVIEW

Defining Agritourism

While lacking a universal definition, agritourism falls under the broader scope of rural tourism. Rural tourism is defined as "visits to rural settings to experience unique attractions and events that are not readily available or offered in urbanized areas" (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food).

This report uses a definition of agritourism that is consistent with OMAF and other jurisdictions in Ontario. For the purposes of this Action Plan, agritourism refers to the economic activity that occurs when people link travel with agricultural products, services or experiences. This encompasses all activities and attractions that connect tourists to a working farm or other agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation (including ranches). Agricultural fairs, farmers' markets, events with an agricultural theme and on-farm accommodations are also included in this category.

This report also takes into account the numerous other channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products. These "off-farm" channels, including restaurants, retailers, accommodations, etc. are referred to throughout the report as food tourism. Food tourism is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

"The economic activity that occurs when people link travel with agricultural products, services or experiences"

- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF)

"The act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education or personal involvement in the activities of the farm or operation."

- definition from the University of California's Small Farm Center (2011) and accepted by OMAF

WHAT DOES AGRITOURISM INCLUDE?

- Roadside stands and on-farm markets
- Pick-your-own farms/orchards
- Animal feeding and petting zoos
- Hay and/or sleigh rides
- Corn and/or straw mazes
- Wagon rides
- Horseback riding
- Farm stays
- Seasonal festivals
- Barn dances
- Birthday and corporate parties (on farm)
- School tours and summer day camps (i.e. "edutainment")
- Cross-country skiing/snow-shoeing/snowmobiling (on farm)
- Open house/farm crawls
- Pumpkin carving/painting
- Historical re-enactments (on farm)
- Musical events/live entertainment (on farm)

Agritourism Drivers

As the nature of farming and agriculture in Ontario continues to change and farmers are forced to adapt to increased economic pressures in order to survive, on-farm diversification is becoming increasingly popular and necessary as a means of generating revenue. Agritourism not only provides farmers with these new revenue streams, it also gives a destination new products and experiences to market.

In many ways, Halton Region is ideally suited to agritourism. With its prime agricultural land, ample natural landscapes and urban centers situated nearby, Halton offers the types of experiences that are attractive to agritourists and an urban market to deliver the visitors necessary to make these agritourism operations viable.

Halton's on-farm experiences include pick-your-own farms and seasonal themed events.

Agritourism aligns with societal trends and consumers' growing interest in returning to a simpler time – escaping the demands of an urban lifestyle and reconnecting to their foodways and to nature. Public concern over the globalized scale of food production and distribution is another contributing factor increasing consumers' interest in farms (qtd. in Ainley and Smale, 59-63).

WHY DOES AGRITOURISM MATTER?

Declining numbers of farms and farm incomes across Canada speaks to a decline and destabilization of rural economies (*Agritourism Development Strategy*, 5). Agritourism presents a potential tool to help stem these losses by providing value for both the farmer *and* the consumer.

Investing in agritourism development can:

- increase on-farm revenue
- reduce dependence on volatile commodity prices
- supplement core farming income
- more effectively use farm resources, such as lower grade land
- promote or sustain farm heritage
- provide a venue for education and appreciation of rural issues

- provide new employment opportunities
- provide diverse revenue streams
- preserve the land
- bridge urban-rural gaps
- engage communities around food and agriculture
- enhance environmental and community sustainability

Agritourism enhances the appeal of fresh, flavourful local foods and provides a beneficial relationship for local food systems (qtd. in Nasers, 6). On-farm and direct marketing through agritourism offerings have positive effects for farmers. By connecting directly with consumers, farmers are able to bypass traditional distribution systems and earn a larger portion of the profits.

A recent study by the Waterloo Regional Health Authority found that through direct marketing initiatives, a consumer's price paid to a farmer increased up to ten-fold, from $0.09/dollar to as much as $.90/dollar (*Agritourism Development Strategy*, 5). In Britain, the New Economics Foundation found that for every £1 spent on a vegetable box, £2.59 was generated for the local economy, compared with only £1.41 from the supermarket.

The impact of agritourism is not purely economical – there are social and cultural benefits from developing these experiences as well. Visitor interaction was found to be a motivating factor for farm operators interested in developing agritourism (qtd. in Nasers, 12). For consumers, agritourism offers an entertaining, hands-on approach to increasing their understanding of the agricultural industry, the food system and rural issues affecting local farmers.

Agritourism provides visitors with opportunities to make direct connections to their local food producers and the rural environment. Experiencing the rural environment may also include visits to horse ranches and trail riding along the agricultural landscape. Agritourists may also be interested in learning about specific farming practices (qtd. in Ecker et al, 4) and want to contribute to the sustainability of the farming industry.

AGRITOURISM WORLDWIDE – BEST PRACTICES

EUROPE

England

England is one of the leading nations committed to developing agritourism, with over 7,200 agritourism businesses in operation (Symmes, 2013). Support of this initiative comes from the British Government, which has repeatedly acknowledged the role of countryside visitations in increasing overall tourism in the nation (*Agritourism Development Strategy*, 47). Farmers receive grants and loans to make on-farm improvements possible and add overnight accommodations. The British Government also created the Farm Holiday Bureau (FHB) or "Farm Stay UK", which encourages accommodation development and assists farmers with resources and marketing support.

Within England, the County of Devon has used agritourism as a vehicle for promoting their way of life, environment and products to a wider audience. Some farmers have

created an agritourism program called “Devon Farms” that encompasses criteria and formal inspections (*Agritourism Development Strategy*, 48). The county’s annual cookbook, *The Devon Food Book*, was also awarded the Gourmand World Cookbook award in 2005 and 2006 for “Best Local Cookbook”.

Italy

Tourism has long been one of Italy’s main markets and is fully supported by the Italian Government. Agritourism in particular has been hugely successful, attracting large numbers of tourists and providing a means for farming families to innovate and diversify their traditional production while providing incentive to restore and conserve the historical farmhouses, castles and villas that dot the countryside.

In South Tyrol, a northern region of Italy, innovative branding around agritourism has helped raised the profile of the region’s producers and growers. Through the Gallo Rosso accreditation process, a “Red Rooster” trademark was created to highlight farms, inns, bars and quality farm products in the region of utmost quality. Government aid is also available to all farms in the form of subsidies. Between 1999 and 2007, South Tyrol saw a 223% increase in visitors and a 207% increase in overnight stays (*Agritourism Development Strategy*, 49).

More best practices around agritourism and branding initiatives are discussed in Chapter 8b) Enhancing the Simply Local *Program.*

AUSTRALIA

In Australia, agritourism has been widely embraced by rural communities looking to bring tourism into their regions in a sustainable way and provide new revenue streams for farmers. The Australian Government recognizes the role of agritourism as a significant economic driver and launched a project in 2009 to examine how government policies can help agricultural industries grow.

Queensland

In 2001, the Australian Tropical Foods program was created by food industry leaders to heighten awareness of local produce. With support from the Federal and Regional governments, the program helps farmers diversify and develop agritourism offerings. The Australian Department of Tourism also offers a wealth of resources for interested agribusiness operations, including workshops and business management assistance (*Agritourism Development Strategy*, 50).

UNITED STATES

Agritourism has exploded in popularity in the United States. Per the United States Census of Agriculture, income from agritourism and recreational services increased by 280% in a five year period, from $202M in 2002 to over $566M in 2007 (qtd. in Nasers, 3).

Kentucky

Agritourism in Kentucky is a booming industry with the state reporting over $4B in farm gate sales each year (*Nova Scotia Culinary Tourism & Agritourism Study,* 2005). In 2002, the Department of Agriculture established an Office of Agritourism to increase

efforts in this sector and published a White Paper on Agritourism that attributed the rise in agritourism in part as a reaction to the decline in tobacco farms across the state. Heavy promotion of the "Kentucky Proud" and "Kentucky Farms are Fun" brands has helped the public understand the vital role of local farms.

Vermont

According to the New England Agricultural Statistics Service (NEASS), one-third of all farms in Vermont received income from agritourism in 2002. During that year, the income from agritourism activities was $19.5M, representing an 86% increase from the revenues generated in 2000. Products grown and sold on the farm site, including sales of maple syrup and cheese, were the most common sources of income for Vermont farmers.

The federal and state governments both support Vermont's agritourism initiatives. Launched in 1998, the Vermont Farms! Association was founded to provide the public with educational opportunities around agriculture and sustain Vermont's working farms.

New Jersey

Recognizing that one of the major issues for agricultural sustainability was attracting new farmers and succession planning, New Jersey chose to focus on agritourism as a means of supporting the farming industry and fostering new growth.

In 2006, New Jersey's agritourism revenue totalled over $57 million dollars, with the majority of this revenue coming from on-farm direct sales to consumers (The Economic Impact of Agritourism in New Jersey, 2006). Of the over 730,000 acres of New Jersey farmland, 43% of this land was associated with agritourism. In addition, 1 in every 5 farms practiced some form of agritourism. By comparison, only 6% of Halton's total farms (or 1 in 16) were identified as having agritourism offerings in the SWOT analysis (see Chapter 6).

"Agritourism expands employment opportunities for farm family members, particularly younger family members representing the next generation of farmers. The income agritourism generates for some farms is significant."
- "Agritourism: A Lifeline for Working Farms & Their Communities", NJAES

One of the keys to success in New Jersey was the implementation of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES). The NJAES engages both farmers and policy makers helping to bridge the perception gap between agritourism operators and those who make and enforce policy. NJAES offers facilitated workshops to discuss policy and regulatory issues and also offers educational resources to both policy makers and agritourism operators to ensure best business practises are shared and successfully implemented.

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR AGRITOURISM

The above best practices have highlighted many of the factors necessary for agritourism success. Developing a sustainable, celebrated agritourism destination requires many of these elements to be in place:

- Defined leadership roles
- Well defined goals and objectives

- Partnership and community support
- Strong target markets
- Government support (at Municipal, Provincial and Federal levels)
- Authentic, unique "taste of place" and/or experience that incorporates:
    - Educational component and/or opportunity for "taste education"
    - Entertainment component
    - Strong customer service
    - Adequate public facilities and safe accessible environment
- Location (proximity to other attractions and major roadways/highways)
- Marketing and promotion
- Availability of resources
- Effective business management
- Knowledge of regulations and legal requirements

BARRIERS TO AGRITOURISM

As noted above, there are significant benefits for farms that diversify their operations through agritourism. Barriers or perceptions that prevent farms from implementing these agritourism initiatives may hinder this success. From OCTA's considerable experience in developing agritourism products and experiences, the most common barriers and misconceptions include:

- Restrictive or complicated regulations and policies
- Funding
- High taxation
- Signage (unclear or missing)
- Infrastructure
- Public/insurance liability
- Confusion/lack of resources
- Seasonality
- Loss of privacy
- Transportation
- Capital investment
- Lack of skills or knowledge of skills required

AGRITOURISM IN ONTARIO

Farm involvement in agritourism is increasing, as are revenues from agritourism across the province. Farmers' Markets Ontario® estimated that 27,000 people work in the agritourism sector and have a $1.8B impact on the provincial economy. In 2005 and 2009, the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association (OFFMA) conducted surveys with farmers, marketers and consumers, estimating that:

- In 2005, 400 farms practicing agritourism with a return of $166M in sales
- In 2009, 750 farms practicing agritourism with a return of $210M in sales
- Over 8M people visit on-farm markets annually
- Nearly half (43%) of respondents in 2009 indicated intentions to build or expand their on-farm market
- In 2009, 72% of these farms reported a recent increase in visitors

In a 2010 study of Canadian agritourists, the prevalence of agritourists in Ontario was found to be significantly higher than the national average. Study researchers

proposed that this finding might reflect the "strong, traditional ties to agriculture and the greater support for agritourism farm diversification and government-sponsored marketing initiatives" (qtd. in Ainley and Smale, 71-72).

WHAT DOES AN AGRITOURIST LOOK LIKE IN ONTARIO?

The nation-wide *2006 Canadian Travel Activities and Motivation Survey* (*TAMS*) profiled visitors participating in on-farm activities. The survey is an examination of the recreational activities and travel habits of Canadians and Americans. It collects out-of-town, overnight travel behaviour of one or more nights and provides detailed information on travelers' activities, travel motivators, places visited, type of accommodation used, impressions of Canada, demographics, and media consumption patterns.

From the *2006 TAMS* report, the following traits for agritourists emerged:

- Predominantly domestic travelers
- Married (67.3%), women (54.6%) with no children under 18 (68.9%)
- Highly educated (34% have a university degree)
- Interest in agritourism increases with household income

Similarly, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducted its own survey in 2007 to profile visitors to farms with recreational activities. The findings align with those in the Canadian travel market study:

- Most agritourists lived within 40 miles of the farms they visited
- Agritourists are more likely to be highly educated (33% held a bachelor's degree vs. 20% for the national average)

Per the *2006 TAMS* report, agritourists are also more likely to:

- Go shopping/dining
- Visit historical sites, museums and art galleries
- Attend festivals and fairs
- Attend wine, beer and food tastings
- Participate in cultural experiences
- Participate in outdoor activities (e.g. swimming, hiking, wildlife viewing)
- Attend equestrian events (14.0% vs. 5.3% for non-agritourists)
- Go horseback riding (11.7% vs. 5.9% for non-agritourists)

These secondary interests highlight the similarities between agri and food tourists and show the value of developing and promoting experiences that give the agritourist more ways to experience the local food and culture of a destination than solely at the farm.

This desire to connect to agriculture and experience regional culture is also an important motivator for equine tourists:

Motivations & Travel Patterns of Equine Tourism Respondents	
Like being away from the city	90%
Typically bring camping supplies, fuel, etc.	57%
Get the feel of local culture	41%
Try regional foods	37%
Visit farmers' markets	32%
Visit vineyards/wineries	24%
Visit farms	22%

Kline, Carol. "Highlights of the 2008 Virginia Equestrian Tourism Survey Results"

A 2008 survey of 800+ equine tourists in Virginia found the average incomes of the surveyed riders to be relatively high with 61% reporting earnings between $50,000 and $150,000 and 24% reporting an income greater that $150,000 (*Virginia Equestrian Tourism Survey*, 2008). These findings echo those of agri and food tourists. Interest in packaged equestrian vacations was also significant, with 67% of respondents indicating they would "definitely" book a trail riding trip if a package was available.

In terms of marketing to agritourists, the *2006 TAMS* report found the following travel patterns for agritourists:

- 49.5% have a specific destination before starting travel research
- 68.6% consult the internet
- 62.9% take the advice of others when planning their trip
- 89.1% read the weekend edition of the newspaper (vs. 68% for local papers)
- 57.2% visit travel websites
- 37% watch travel shows, 36.5% watch cooking shows

For on-farm market visitation, the 2009 OFFMA survey found that these agritourism activities attracted an ethnically diverse base of tourists and that three-quarters of these customers traveled less than thirty minutes to reach their destination. Halton Region's close proximity to the Greater Toronto Area, which had an estimated population of 5.58M in 2011 (*Statistics Canada*), represents a significant customer base to market to.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACHIEVING AGRITOURISM SUCCESS IN ONTARIO

It is a very positive time for agriculture in Ontario. Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food, Kathleen Wynne, has demonstrated her commitment to the agricultural sector since taking office in February 2013. In this short time, the Local Food Act and the Local Food Fund have been introduced, which Halton Region may be able to leverage to implement some of the recommendations discussed later in this report.

The renewed focus on local food and agriculture in Ontario makes it an opportune time to address and overcome regulatory and policy barriers. In the 2009 *Food and Farm in the Creative Age* report published by Sustain Ontario, five key land use planning policies impacting the sustainability, innovation and the economic viability of agriculture in southern Ontario were identified. It was recommended in this report that these critically relevant segments of the agricultural sector be addressed through

Provincial, Regional and Municipal policies. The five segments and their relevance to agritourism are highlighted below.

1. Secondary Uses or Mixed Use

- Includes agritourism and value-adding industries such as specialty cropping, market gardening, bed & breakfast accommodations, farm operations and commercial and industrial activities related to agriculture
- While it is broadly defined by the Provincial Policy Statement, policies are ultimately interpreted and implemented by regions, municipalities, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan and the Greenbelt Plan, which can hinder flexibility and innovation in agriculture.
- The ability to develop secondary or mixed use practices on farms is an important element relating to the success of agritourism and ultimately the ability of farmers to increase their revenue.
- Farm stays, licensed events and on-farm dining are all growing trends in agri and food tourism and currently represent a gap in Halton's offerings.

2. Value-Adding

- Value-added agricultural products are raw products that have undergone additional stages of processing. The report concluded that activities such as distribution, packaging and processing are currently hindered by several policies including the Provincial Policy Statement, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan and the Greenbelt Plan, as well as upper and lower tier municipal official plans and zoning by-laws.
- Value-adding diversifies farms, provides consumers and tourists with unique products and provides additional income to a family farm.
- For agri and food tourists, the ability to purchase a unique, farm-produced "taste of place" provides them with edible souvenirs they will share with family and friends long after their visit.
- The report suggests that land use planning should be made more flexible to allow innovation and creativity on farms in this area.

3. Severances

- In order to protect prime agricultural areas, land use policies restrict and minimize the number and types of new lots that can be created.
- Unfortunately between 1990 and 2000, 80% of severances were applied to residential use (OMAFRA).
- This is viewed as a threat to farm communities and systems as not only is the agricultural land lost to residential purposes, but that fragmented landscapes are also created as a result. This makes it difficult to grow and harvest crops and limits future agricultural growth.
- From a tourism perspective, residential developments diminish the rural, pastoral appeal that drives tourists and locals to agritourism destinations.

4. Minimum Farm Parcel Size (MFPS)

- This regulation, as the name states, protects farmland from being divided into parcels that are too small for future agricultural practices.
- For most prime agricultural areas in Ontario, MFPS is 40 hectares, which is a fairly significant area of land and would require substantial investment.
- While in theory this is a valid policy, the cost for the land, labour and capital to operate a farm of 40 hectares is substantial and may deter new farmers from entering the sector while discouraging small and medium diversified farms.
- Small farms may also be more nimble, easily changing crop production and diversification based on changing economic conditions and consumer trends.
- Land size is a double-edged sword – MFPS must be considered alongside severance policies and issues. Future farming may be limited if land size requirements are too high, yet if they are too small it can present a similar threat to the farming community – especially when the fragmented land is not being used for agricultural purposes.

5. Minimum Distance Separation Formulae (MDSF)

- The MDSF is a land use planning tool intended to reduce farm and non-farm residential conflicts.
- With the addition of residential developments in once agriculturally dominant areas, this formulae places restrictions on the future location of certain farming operations and also limits the expansion of farms currently operating.
- MDSF may reduce opportunities to grow or innovate farming businesses to meet the demands of agri and food tourists.

WHAT DOES AGRITOURISM LOOK LIKE IN HALTON REGION?

In the *Sustainable Halton: Agricultural Countryside Vision* report, Halton was identified as having a "competitive advantage over many agricultural regions" (9). This report cited Halton's soil characteristics and proximity to urban markets as factors that strongly position the region to meet growing consumer demand.

The value of the agricultural sector is recognized and supported through planning and policy development by the Region. This is evident in the Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 38 to the *2006 Halton Regional Official Plan*, which identifies one of its objectives as "maintaining a permanently secure, economically viable agricultural industry" (77). Halton Region's *2011-2014 Citizen's Priorities Action Plan* and the *Economic Development Strategic Implementation Plan 2012-21* also reflect this commitment to agriculture in the region with specific initiatives and actions outlined to achieve these goals.

In order to better understand the perspective of Halton Region's farming community regarding policy and regulatory issues affecting agritourism in Halton, OCTA conducted one-on-one interviews and group workshops with key stakeholders. The following is a summary of their identified issues and comments that are directly tied to agritourism. While other, more general issues threatening agricultural sustainability and having an obvious impact on agritourism were identified, they are not included in this report.

- Restrictive Policies

    - Changes related to heritage policies, such as changing crops, structures and land use, are viewed as restrictive - preventing innovation, growth, and the ability to add new revenue streams and value-added experiences (like agritourism) that make farm businesses sustainable.
    - Several agritourism land uses (e.g. on-farm accommodations) are currently not permitted.

- Financial Barriers
    - Many stakeholders identified taxation policies and costs to meet regulatory requirements as a significant deterrent to innovation, growth (e.g. agritourism) and in some cases, the long-term sustainability of their farm.
    - Development Charges (DC) By-law No. 48-12 came into effect in September 2012 and has inflicted relatively high charges for expanding and developing on-farm retail operations.

- Education and Tools
    - While regulatory barriers are not unique to Halton region, it is the belief of many stakeholders that Halton is one of the most highly regulated regions due to the number of organizations with policies affecting the area.
    - This results in a great deal of complexity for farmers to navigate, causing confusion and frustration and in some cases, acting as a deterrent to innovation or business growth.
    - Additional tools and education, preferably from a neutral source, would help the farming community to better understand opportunities, limitations and approaches to meeting policy requirements while still fostering innovation and the development of new agritourism opportunities.
    - There was also a desire to learn more about business planning and agritourism product development.

HALTON RURAL AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY

Halton Region is currently in the process of developing a *Rural Agricultural Strategy* (RAS), with completion expected by Summer 2014. The strategic focus of the RAS is to provide the Region with clear directions related to the sustainability of the agriculture economy and provide an outlook of the agriculture economy over the next five, ten and twenty years. The RAS is also intended to identify key areas for the region to play a significant role in strengthening the agricultural sector in Halton by positively influencing the agricultural community, adding value to current agribusinesses and attracting new, compatible businesses to the region.

While providing specific policy recommendations is outside of the scope of this Action Plan, OCTA recommends that the particular topics identified above should be explored and addressed as part of the RAS, with consideration as to their effect on agritourism development.

GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE FOOD AND FARMING PLAN

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan has also identified many of the above-mentioned challenges. This collaborative, cross-organizational group, which

includes the Region, has developed an Action Plan (conditional on funding) to address issues and activate change over the period 2011-2021. In addition to exploring challenges through the RAS, OCTA encourages Halton Region to maintain active participation with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farm Alliance.

5. FOOD TOURISM OVERVIEW

"When you travel through the world exploring food, you get this interesting window about the culture and the environment because food is the bridge between the land and the culture."

- "A Growing Taste for Culinary Travel", CNN

Food tourism, as defined in the *2011-2015 Provincial Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan*, includes any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition or culinary techniques of that region.

Virtually any tourism experience can be enriched by food and drink. Developed properly, culinary tourism tells the story of the heritage, the people and the landscape of a geographic area. It reflects 'place', enriches experiences, and can be a valuable tool to boost economic, social and community development.

According to the World Food Travel Association (WFTA, formerly the International Culinary Tourism Association), the interest in food and drink is reflected in the growth of food media, the explosion of local food movements and the number of mainstream events now featuring local and regional cuisine. This is certainly the case in Ontario.

In its 2010 report titled *The State of the Culinary Tourism Industry Readiness Index*, the WFTA cited Ontario as one of three world-wide leaders in culinary tourism among the nine countries surveyed. The province is characterized as a "hotspot" based on the level of culinary tourism activity in community, education, development and promotion.

WHAT DOES FOOD TOURISM INCLUDE?

- Farmers' markets
- Food and/or drink festivals
- Cooking/wine-tasting classes
- Harvesting or other farm operations
- Dining at restaurants featuring local ingredients or recipes
- Dining at high-end restaurants with an international reputation
- Dining at other high-end restaurants
- Going to local cafés
- Dining at a farm
- Shopping or browsing gourmet foods in retail stores
- Day visits and tasting at wineries and breweries
- Pick-your-own farms/orchards
- Farm stays
- Harvest festivals
- Aboriginal cuisine

WHY DOES FOOD TOURISM MATTER?

"Culinary [food] tourism has reached the tipping point as a niche and an industry. Unique food and drink are the perfect attractions, especially for second and tertiary destinations that now must market more proactively in the globally competitive market."

- Erik Wolf, World Food Travel Association

Research findings of the World Food Travel Association underline just how vital this sector of the tourism industry is - nearly 100% of all tourists dine out when traveling and food and beverage as a category ranks first and foremost in visitor spending, even more than lodging.

Based on a 2004 Ryerson University Study conducted by Dr. Richard Wade, the average culinary tourist spends double that of a generic tourist. The average culinary tourist was also found to spend triple that of a generic tourist on fine dining, seven times more on wineries and 40% more on accommodation.

Overall, respondents who reported culinary offerings as a driving factor in their traveling considerations exceeded the average expenditure in each of the following categories: fine-dining, casual dining, lodging, entertainment, shopping, wineries and culinary product.

BARRIERS TO FOOD TOURISM

- Funding
- Signage
- Confusion/lack of resources
- Seasonality
- Transportation
- Lack of marketing and promotional resources
- Lack of coherent branding and messaging
- Lack of skills or knowledge of skills required
- Competition
- Capital investment

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR FOOD TOURISM

From the *2005-2015 Culinary Tourism in Ontario Strategy and Action Plan*:

- Leadership
- Market ready or near market ready culinary products and resources
- Integrated strategy
- Partnership and community-based collaboration
- Financial support and performance measures
- Destinations with good access from key origin markets
- Sufficient market intelligence
- Food tourism resources distinctive to the region
- Destination with multiple food tourism experiences
- Effective destination marketing
- Safe and accessible environment

FOOD TOURISM – BEST PRACTICES

EUROPE

Scotland

In Scotland, whisky ranks as their top export with annual exports of $6.5B, or the

equivalent of 34 bottles a second being shipped worldwide. The value of the global market for scotch surpasses cognac and champagne combined with nearly 10,000 people directly employed and 30,000 employed in supporting industries in Scotland. Over 100 distilleries are in operation and attract over 1.2 million visitors each year, with the total economic impact of whisky on Scotland's economy estimated at £4.2 billion (Scotch Whisky Association, 2013).

Set against the backdrop of the Edinburgh Castle, the Edinburgh Farmers' Market features 55 specialist producers.

Long regarded as a drink destination, Scotland is working hard to become a food destination as well. In 2009, Scotland of Food and Drink became the unifying organization to bring food and drink tourism and agriculture together to drive the Scottish brand and tourism. This umbrella organization of various food, drink and agricultural stakeholders is aiming to grow this segment of the tourism industry to $20B by 2017 and build a reputation as a destination known as "the land of food and drink".

Ireland

Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, has recognized its enormous food offering and the potential of food tourism as an economic driver for the country. In order to maximize their attractiveness as a food destination and engage their stakeholders, Fáilte Ireland hired a food tourism expert consultant to bring interested parties together in order to achieve tasks under a common framework. Their vision was to have Ireland be recognised by visitors for the availability, quality and value of their local and regional food experiences.

Ireland now has seven Michelin-star restaurants, an indication of the vibrancy and strength of the Irish culinary scene. There are also several food trails that take visitors along the countryside, including the award-winning Ireland Whiskey Trail, a free touring guide that highlights over 40 different whiskey producers.

AUSTRALIA

Australia is capitalizing on the potential of wine tourism. Wine plays a significant role in the national tourism industry, contributing $33B to the Australian economy and generating 200,000 jobs in regional areas of the country. According to the *2011 National Wine Tourism Strategy* produced for the Winemakers' Federation of Australia, international and domestic overnight visitors spent upwards of $7B at Australian wineries.

Initially, Australia had a number of strategies led by different stakeholder groups but in 2008 the government worked with the stakeholders to create a cohesive, clear strategy for developing wine and food tourism in the country. At the core of the strategy was the Government's acknowledgement that focusing on wine and food would benefit tourism, agriculture, food production for domestic and international consumption.

UNITED STATES

New Orleans

Listed as one of the "20 Best Food Cities" in the world by *Food and Wine* magazine and "The Best Food City in the Nation" by *Saveur* magazine, New Orleans is quickly becoming known for its food as much as for its festivities.

In 2008, the Louisiana Travel Promotion Association (LTPA) received $650,000 in public and private funding. This money went to mapping culinary trails and promoting the region's signature Bayou and Cajun cuisine across the nation and internationally. According to the association's co-executive director Darienne Mobley, the goal of the LTPA was to change Louisiana's image as a natural disaster site: "we wanted to have a single message, and that was the culinary experience of Louisiana" (Melnick, 2010).

American South

"There's a deep and profound interest in the Southern food culture right now and it's because in these over-processed times, people are hungry for anything that's real."

- John T. Edge, Southern Foodways Alliance

It's not just New Orleans - food tourism is booming across the southern United States. Founded in 1999, the Southern Foodways Alliance is aimed at documenting and celebrating the diverse food cultures of the South. The SFA hosts an annual barbecue symposium, organizes field trips, produces documentary films and promotes popular culinary trails and programs around such Southern staples as gumbo, tamales and boudin. Ten years after its inception, the SFA received the 2009 Global Vision Award from *Travel + Leisure* magazine.

More best practices around food tourism and marketing initiatives are discussed in Chapter 8b) Enhancing the Simply Local *Program.*

WHAT DOES A GLOBAL FOOD TOURIST LOOK LIKE?

The *Global Report on Food Tourism*, published by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Travel Industry of America (TIA) have identified the following traits about food tourists:

- Concerned about origin of products
- Eating is a means of socializing and exchanging experiences with others
- Higher-than average expenditure
- Demanding and appreciative
- High level of loyalty
- Revisit destinations due to gastronomy
- 85% of food tourists enjoy learning about local culture and cuisines
- 70% of food tourists enjoy bringing back regional foods, recipes and wines from places to share with family and friends

OCTA's research over the past number of years indicates that there are three distinct segments of the food tourism market:

High Interest (10%)
These are tourists who plan trips based on the food experience. They spend twice as much on their tourism experience overall as any other tourist.

Moderate Interest (80%)
These are tourists who incorporate a food experience in their overall itinerary. While food may not be the primary motivator attracting travelers to that destination, food is of growing importance to that overall experience. There is great opportunity within this market to develop food tourism products.

Low Interest (10%)
These are tourists who are travelling through an area and make an unplanned stop to eat. These stopover locations present another opportunity to promote local culinary tourism experiences.

FOOD TOURISM IN ONTARIO

Food tourism is no longer a niche market. It's potential to motivate and attract travelers is ripe. All tourists eat, including the more than 42.8 million overnight visitors Ontario welcomed in 2010, of which 82.9% are domestic (from Canada) visitors (*Travel Survey of Residents of Canada*; *International Travel Survey*, 2010).

Food tourism is a significant revenue generator and job creator. In 2011, the commercial and non-commercial foodservice sector in Ontario had forecast sales of $24.4B (40% of the national total) and employed more than 409,000 individuals, according to Statistics Canada.

Lori Stahlbrand, founder of Local Food Plus (LFP), estimates that the economic impact of eating local food has a 3:1 impact on the local economy, while Wine Council of Ontario President Hillary Dawson states that the impact of consuming Ontario wines has a 12:1 impact (*2011-2015 Provincial Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan*). According to a 2012 study conducted for the Wine Council of Ontario, wine tourism is expected to increase by at least 20% in the next five years. Ontario's VQA industry had generated $191M in economic value-added $10M in 2010 alone (*Economic Impact of VQA,* 9).

WHAT DOES AN ONTARIO FOOD TOURIST LOOK LIKE?

The *2006 TAMS* report provides further insight into food tourists in the province and underscores their value. Ontario food tourists are:

- More likely to be from larger urban areas
- More likely to do extensive research in print and online when trip planning
- More likely to be affluent than other Ontarians

Household Income	Food Tourist	Non-Participant
<$20,000	3.7%	7.8%
$20,000-$40,000	9.0%	16.4%
$40,000-$59,900	13.6%	16.5%
$60,000-$79,900	14.9%	14.1%
$80,000-$99,900	12.3%	12.0%
≥ $100,000	35.1%	17.6%
Not stated	11.4%	15.5%

- More positive, energetic attitudes than other Ontarians

Life Attitudes	Food Tourist	Non-Participant
Lots of energy for my age	41.7%	32.1%
Like to discover new places	32.6%	25.5%
Be physically active	29.8%	19.4%
Feel in control of my life	37.1%	32.5%
First buy new products	18.7%	12.5%
Make decisions easily	42.1%	34.8%

- More active than other Ontarians

Activity	Food Tourist	Non-Participant
Visiting historic sites	51.2%	19.4%
Swimming in lakes	47.9%	25.7%
Attending live theatre	32.3%	11.7%
Visiting gardens	25.4%	7.7%
Golfing	23.7%	11.7%
Going to a music festival	13.7%	3.9%
Going to a spa	18.1%	3.8%

- Interested in agritourism (31% stated a moderate to high interest)
- More likely to participate in cultural, historical, agricultural, horticultural and outdoor activities

Outside of national borders, the *2006 TAMS* report also found that 125.7 million Americans participated in at least one culinary activity while on an out of town trip between 2004 and 2005, representing 71% of all American travelers.

FOOD TOURISM TRENDS

- The marketing of new cuts of meat (e.g. flat iron pork)
- Growing interest in heritage vegetables, fruits and breeds
- Growing demand for healthy herbs, spices and fruits such as blueberries, rhubarb, shallots and pumpkin seeds
- A growing recognition of the value of partnerships and strategic alliances in tourism for both marketing as well as product innovation
- Increasing use of social media by consumers to access information about culinary opportunities and to comment on these opportunities
- Wider use of technology including kiosk ordering for restaurant meals and iPad wine lists and Apps.

Top 10 Hottest Trends
1. Locally produced and locally inspired dishes
2. Locally grown produce
3. Healthful kids' meals
4. Environmental sustainability
5. Children's nutrition
6. New cuts of meat
7. Hyper-local sourcing
8. Gluten-free cuisine
9. Sustainable seafood
10. Whole grains

Top 5 Produce Trends
Locally grown produce
Organic produce
"Superfruits" (e.g. acai, mangosteen)
Heirloom apples
Exotic fruits (e.g. paw paws)

What's Hot 2013 Chef Survey – National Restaurant Association

Top restaurant trends in the past five years have remained constant, with local sourcing, sustainability and nutrition all identified as areas of interest for consumers. The *2012 CRFA Canadian Chef Survey* echoed these findings, with "locally produced and inspired dishes" topping the list of hottest trends.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated above, agritourism and food tourism are inherently linked and are mutually supportive. Agri and food tourists share similar traits, travel motivations and enjoy similar activities. For this reason, the Agritourism Action Plan incorporates strategies for food tourism as well.

At the heart of any authentic food experience is agriculture. Providing opportunities for tourists to experience a destination's agricultural products, or "tastes of place", creates strong connections to the farming community and allows the agricultural story of the destination to shine. When done effectively, both tourism sectors can become powerful economic drivers, providing farmers with opportunities for diversification, opening new revenue streams and promoting economic development in the region.

6. EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT & SWOT ANALYSIS

This section of the report contains the results of Halton's agri and food tourism inventory assessment viewed through the lens of an agri and/or food tourist.

Agritourism offerings considered in this assessment include all activities and attractions that connect tourists to a working farm or other agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation (including ranches). Agricultural fairs, farmers' markets, events with an agricultural theme and on-farm accommodations are also included in this category.

The assessment also takes into account the numerous other "off-farm" channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products, including; restaurants, retailers, accommodations, etc. (i.e. food tourism offerings).

Agri and food tourists share many of the same motivations for travel (see Chapters 4 and 5), thus businesses that offer visitors an authentic "taste of place" or experience through food are of interest to agri and food tourists alike

The complete inventory of agri and food tourism offerings includes more than 400 listings across the following categories:

- Accommodations
- Attractions
- Equine Experiences
- Culinary Schools
- Farms, Orchards, Pastures and Food Artisans
- Farmers' Markets
- Festivals
- Restaurants
- Retailers (with local food and/or drink offerings)
- Wineries, Breweries, Cideries and Distilleries

Each of the 400+ agri and food tourism business listings was evaluated using OCTA's Experience Assessment Tool (EAT™) and given a rating to reflect market-readiness and commitment to providing an authentic agri and/or food-tourism experience. Additionally, an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) has been identified for each category within a regional context.

EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT TOOL™

Overview

The Experience Assessment Tool (EAT™) collects specific data relating to each agri and food tourism offering and provides an assessment as to the market readiness of the offering to receive tourists.

The tool consists of over 50 data fields, capturing information under the following categories (described below):

- Fundamentals – Location Details
- Fundamentals – Business Details
- Breadth – Operational Details
- Depth – Local Products
- Community Engagement

Based on assigned category-specific weighting across the relevant fields, the tool produces a rating out of 100 for each business. From this numerical value, the tool suggests a market readiness rating of *Champion*, *Leader*, *Follower* or *Subscriber* (outlined below).

The determination of the data fields and unique weighting/rating system was informed by OCTA's considerable expertise assessing authentic agri and food experiences across the province.

While the below outline provides on overview to the numerical market readiness ratings, a number of components were reviewed both individually and holistically to inform the final business rating. While much of the data is quantifiable in nature, the degree to which a business was delivering and promoting a component also impacted the final rating.

Note: Within the tool, there exists the ability to override the numerical rating under special circumstances. This can be done to reward businesses that:

A) Have multiple experiences on-site (5 pts)
B) Offer a unique "taste of place" (e.g. one-of-a-kind experiences, iconic reflection of Ontario/Halton identity) (5 pts)

An override can also be used to lower a business' rating (e.g. lack of coherent web presence, a restaurant that is only sourcing local beverages and no food) if necessary.

DETAILED DATA HEADINGS

The following identifies the data fields along with examples of the considerations for each point.

FUNDAMENTALS: Location & Business Details

Each listing was evaluated on the availability of basic location information, including: a website, phone number, email address and contact details. If this information was difficult for OCTA to find, it would also be challenging for a potential visitor to find. Failure to deliver at this basic level contributed to a lower rating. Improvement in this area is relatively simple for businesses not meeting the criteria.

Many of the elements may seem insignificant on their own but when they are considered holistically they contribute to a clearer picture relating to the level of market-readiness and ability to receive agri and food tourists.

A *"champion"* and *"leader"* rated business would deliver on all of these data fields. A "*follower*" or "*subscriber*" could be lacking in some aspect of this area.

Additional fundamental details that pertained to specific business categories were also assessed here. These details included "Catering/Food Truck/Event space available" for Restaurants, "Available at the LCBO" for Wineries, Breweries, Cideries & Distilleries, and "On-Farm Market" or "Farm Stay Available" for Farms, Orchards, Pastures and Artisans, among others.

Businesses in these categories with additional features were rewarded accordingly for enhancing their offerings.

BREADTH: Operational Details

Data was also collected relating to the agri and food tourism preparedness of the business operation. This area contributed to determining the degree to which the business is accessible to agri and food tourists.

Operational details include hours, signage and mapping, as well as enhanced experiences the business may offer which could include tours, classes, on-site events, major event participation, member benefits, retail and/or entertainment.

Hours of operation and the promotion of these operation details were uniquely assessed in each category, taking into account the seasonal nature of the products being offered. Farms and farmers' markets did not have to be open year-round to receive a *"champion*" or *"leader*" rating. For these businesses, the scope and depth of the experience offered during their operating season was prioritized.

Wineries, Breweries, Cideries and Distilleries, Accommodations, Attractions and Festivals that offered classes, tours, or events on site were weighted more significantly. It is not OCTA's place to assess the quality of wines, beers, or hotel rooms, but whether these businesses offer an enhanced experience for visitors.

A "*champion*" and "*leader*" rated business would strongly deliver on all of these data fields, owing to the exception of farms and farmers' markets which may not run year-round. A "*follower*" would provide and promote operational details and some enhanced experiences, while a "*subscriber*" would most likely not offer or promote these details and/or added offerings.

Note: Many businesses were visited in-market, however this was not feasible for all listings. Photos on websites and Google mapping were used to assess signage.

DEPTH: Local Products

Agri and food tourism experiences should truly reflect the cultural, historical and agricultural heritage of the region and provide authentic tastes of place.

For the off-farm categories of Restaurants, Accommodations, Culinary Schools, and Retail, at least some demonstrated commitment to local sourcing is a precursor for inclusion in the inventory. If local sourcing is not promoted, the business falls short from an agri and food tourism perspective.

The categories of Attractions, Equine Experiences, and Festivals were included in the

inventory whether of not they had a local food offering as they contribute to the overall agritourism offering of the region. However, those that did not offer local food or drink were not given a rating. The remaining categories of Farms, Orchards, Pastures and Artisans, and Farmers' Markets reflect the agricultural and local food offering by their very nature.

While OCTA recognizes the importance of sourcing from Halton in providing tourists with a true "taste of place", for the purposes of this assessment, "local" was defined as "from Ontario". It was also noted when products were sourced directly from Halton Region. This information was not always easy to find and was gathered through web research (e.g. posted menus, travel reviews, articles) or through direct conversations wherever possible. When the information was not available it was not included. Missing information and poor promotion that would make it difficult for a visitor to determine the business' commitment to local would contribute to a lower rating.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The data fields included in this area provided a perspective relating to how and where businesses communicate and to some extent, level of engagement with their visitors.

Without access to the tools required to accurately assess media usage, brand tracking and awareness levels, this was not a comprehensive marketing and communications review. However, it is considered as a component contributing to market-readiness. Social media (and promotion in general) provide a sense of the business' point of view and leadership to some extent. Newsletters demonstrated a commitment to visitors, database and experience enhancement beyond the physical site visit.

Web Presence	Has Website	Facebook	Twitter	Newsletter/Blog
Excellent	✔	✔	✔	✔
Strong	✔	✔	✔	
Some	✔	1-2 of the above		
Limited - None	0-2 of the above			

"*Champion*" and "*leader*" rated experiences actively communicate and promote their businesses and their commitment to local. "*Follower*" rated experiences deliver on some components in this area, while "*subscriber*" rated experiences do so to a lesser extent, if at all.

RECOGNITION

Across all categories, businesses that received an award on either a local, national or international level were noted and these accolades contributed to the business' rating. People's Choice awards were also considered in the rating process, as they indicate community leadership and a strong local following.

EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT RATINGS

The following provides a general description of the market-readiness levels: *Champion*, *Leader*, *Follower*, & *Subscriber*. It should also be noted that these definitions are slightly modified across each business category to accurately reflect what would be considered "market ready" within each category. The detailed categorical definitions are available in Appendix F.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *"Champion"* (90-100%)

"*Champion*" rated businesses are operating at a world-class agri and/or food tourism level. They offer a depth and authenticity of experience that is a unique reflection of the region's agricultural identity. Local agri and/or food tourism *"champions"* offer experiences that could compete with the very best agritourism experiences in the world and demonstrate a significant commitment to local food and drink. A *"champion"* rated business has achieved recognition outside the province and is generally spearheaded by a vocal, leading figure(s) intent on establishing Halton's agricultural and/or edible identity.

In-market research was conducted for all "champion" rated businesses, excluding farms that were not open during the project timeframe.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *" Leader"* (76-89%)

Businesses achieving a market ready rating of "*leader*" offer a depth and authenticity of experience that is a unique reflection of the region's agricultural identity. Local agri and/or food tourism *"leaders"* offer experiences with considerable breadth and have a demonstrated commitment to local food and drink. Although offering high quality experiences, leader-rated businesses are missing one or two of the *"champion"* rating criteria and lack recognition on a larger scale.

In-market research was conducted for all "leader" rated businesses, excluding farms that were not open during the project timeframe.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *"Follower"* (50-75%)

"*Follower*" rated businesses show some commitment to offering visitors an authentic regional experience. They often promote their local food and drink offerings but are not consistently strong in all areas and may not have developed an experience beyond their core offering.

In many cases, these businesses represent a tangible opportunity to strengthen the agri and food tourism offerings in the region, as they have a basic infrastructure in place and have demonstrated an interest in promoting the region's agricultural assets and/or in local sourcing.

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism *"Subscriber"* (0-49%)

Businesses at the "*subscriber*" level offer a very limited authentic expression of the region. They may just be starting to offer local food and/or drink or demonstrate only a marginal amount of local sourcing (e.g. have begun featuring VQA wines on their wine list). This category also encompasses businesses that may be growing/sourcing an

extensive number of products but have very low visibility to tourists and poor web presence.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN HALTON?

Total Potential Businesses in Inventory: 441
Total Agri and/or Food Tourism Businesses with Local Sourcing: 338

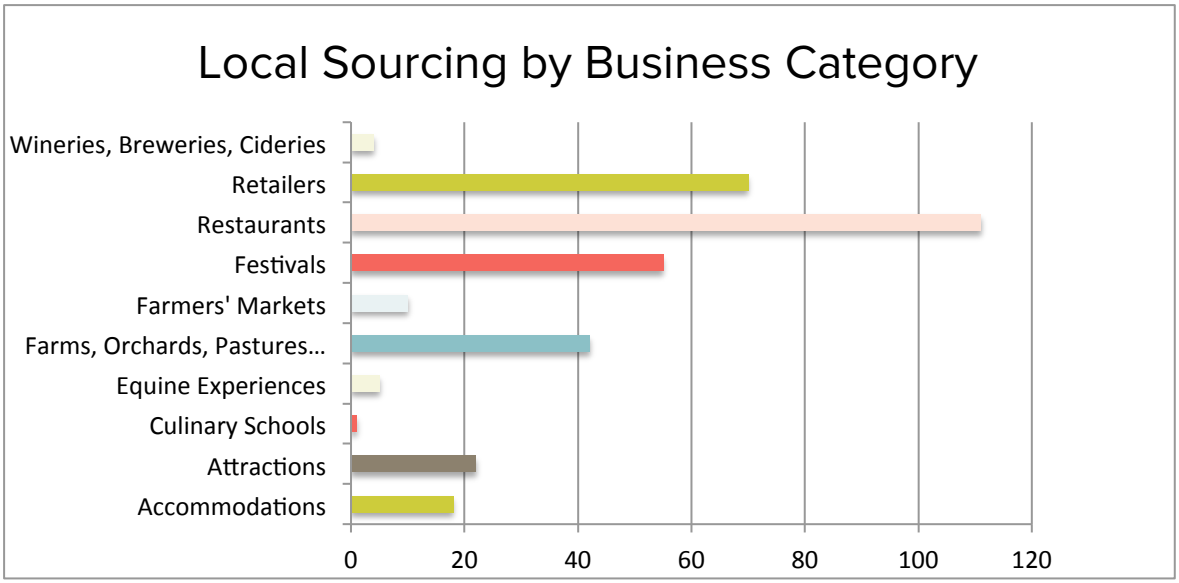
The following ratings pertain to the 338 local sourcing businesses in the inventory:

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Champions*": 2 (0.6%)
Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Leaders*": 15 (4.4%)

Authentic "Tastes of Place"

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Followers*": 110 (32.5%)
Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Subscribers*": 211 (62.4%)

Development Opportunities



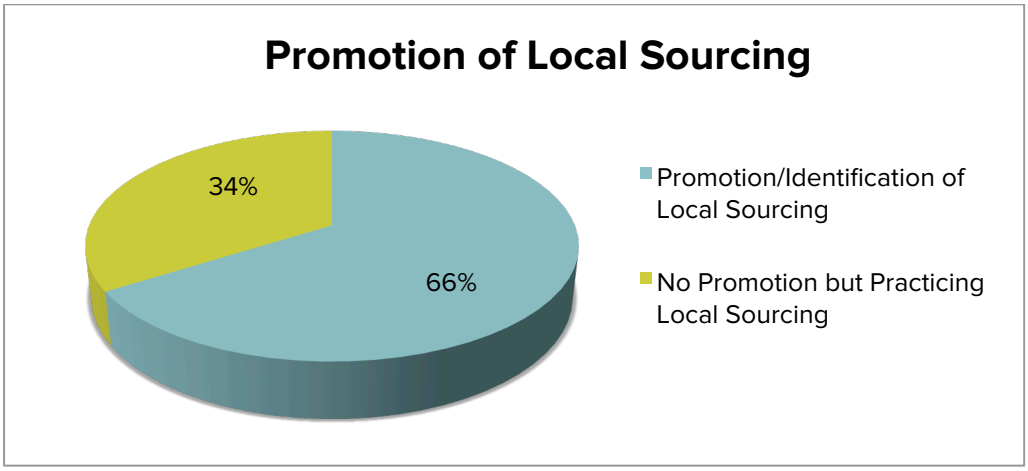
Note: 103 businesses in the categories of Accommodations, Attractions and Festivals/Events were found to have no local food and drink sourcing. These businesses were included to identify gaps and opportunities for showcasing authentic regional tastes but were not given a rating. Likewise, stables that are private clubs and do not offer tourist-friendly programming were not assigned a rating. Unrated businesses are not as of yet meeting the expectations of an agri or food tourist.

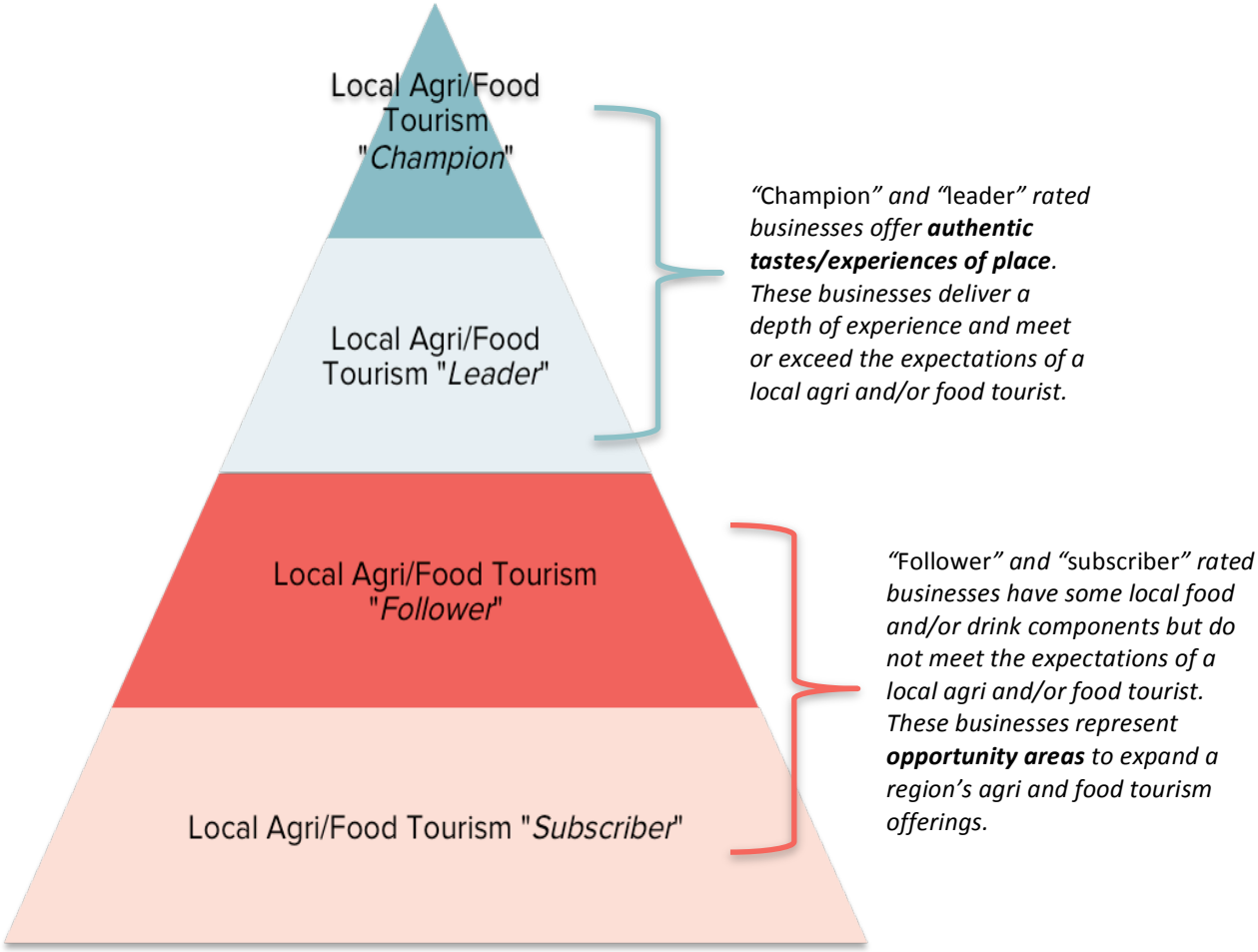
Expectations of an agri and/or food tourist include but are not limited to:

- accessibility (open to public and tourist-friendly)
- educational or hands on experience
- unique reflection of the region
- agricultural component
- some local food or drink component

- authenticity of experience

From the 338 businesses that are sourcing locally (at least to some extent), only 223 of these are promoting this sourcing. Without effective labeling and promotion, a potential tourist will have difficulty determining whether local sourcing exists and may instead choose another business with clearly identified local food and drink offerings.





Overall Regional Perspective

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Champions*": 2 (0.6%)
Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Leaders*": 15 (4.4%)

Authentic "Tastes of Place"

Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Followers*": 110 (32.5%)
Local Agri and/or Food Tourism "*Subscribers*": 211 (62.4%)

Development Opportunities

STRENGTHS

- Four season destination
- Location (within GTA and proximity to Niagara region)
- Affluent local demographics
- Natural assets
- Existing tourism infrastructure
- Engaged, collaborative stakeholders
- Strong VFR market
- Halton Tourism active on social media channels (Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter)
- First Agricultural Liaison Officer appointed in region to link members of agricultural community and Halton Regional Council in 2013
- Ontario Government passed *Ontario Local Food Act* in 2013

Halton Region has a wide range of natural and cultural attractions to offer visitors year-round. Festivals and events are spread across the calendar year, giving visitors another reason to return to the region each season and restaurants, accommodations, retailers, museums and breweries are also open all year.

Halton Region draws a significant number of visitors from its neighbouring markets. Over six million people are located within a three-hour drive of the region, with one-half of guests arriving from Toronto (*Halton Region Annual Tourism Overview*, 1). Halton's proximity to both the Toronto and Hamilton airports, and the international border in Niagara are also strengths.

Engaged, collaborative stakeholders from across the agri and food tourism landscape are another strength in Halton. From the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC) and the Oakville Sustainable Food Project (OSFP) to the Halton Food Council and the chefs spearheading the local food movement, there is a passionate, diverse collection of interested parties working to enact policy change and improve the local food and drink offerings in the region.

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of businesses offering an authentic "taste of place"
- Limited Halton sourced products
- Seasonality of agritourism products and experiences
- Agri and food tourism supply chain

- Location (within the GTA and proximity to Niagara region)
- Accommodations
- Few local beverage options (three breweries and only one winery)
- Below provincial average for daily and overnight spend
- Fragmentation between urban and rural areas
- Resource awareness and connectivity
- Lack of branding and a clear position to differentiate the region
- Lack of awareness of region from a tourism perspective

Looking at an overall snapshot of Halton's local food and drink offerings, there are only two "*champion*" rated businesses and fifteen "*leader*" update numbers rated businesses. This means that from the inventory of 334 businesses, only five per cent of these listings are classified as market ready and offer a signature "taste of place" for agri and food tourists.
In terms of product development, there is currently not a critical mass of businesses to create a trail as only nineteen businesses would meet the expectations of a food tourist. While the creation of a trail or path should remain a long-term goal, the number of businesses offering tastes of place should be further developed before moving ahead with product development. This is to ensure a strong product from both a financial sustainability perspective and a consumer experience perspective.

Another key requirement to developing an agri and/or food tourism product is uniqueness. Food tourists are attracted to products and experiences they feel are a distinct reflection of the region and offering something they can't get anywhere else. With a significant number of visitors coming from neighbouring vicinities and the majority of the local sourcing being province-wide and not region-wide, this is an area of weakness for Halton Region. Without food tourism experiences that reflect and promote the region there is little to differentiate Halton as a destination.

There is also a lack of distinction when it comes to accommodations in the region. There are no destination or luxury accommodations and only seven hotels and inns that provide any on-site dining at all. Only two of these accommodations have some degree of local food and drink promotion. While local sourcing is somewhat common at the bed and breakfasts around the region, the quantity of this type of accommodation is in decline.

From the *2010 Travel Survey of Residents of Canada* and *the International Travel Survey*, it has been identified that Halton's overnight visitor spend ($162 in 2010) and daily visitor spend ($36 in 2010) is considerably lower than that of the province ($182 and $74, respectively). While Halton's average overnight spend is slightly higher than its regional counterparts in Hamilton and Brant, its daily visitor spend is lower than all of the regional averages.

Region Tourism Organization (RTO)	Avg. Overnight Spend/pp 2010	Avg. Daily Spend/pp 2010
Ontario	$182	$74
RTO 1 (Southwest Ontario)	$164	$61
RTO 2 (Niagara & Wine Country)	$275	$78
RTO 3 (Hamilton, Halton, Brant)	$158	$42
Halton Region	**$162**	**$36**
RTO 4 (Huron, Perth, Waterloo, Wellington)	$165	$54
RTO 5 (Greater Toronto Area)	$497	$105
RTO 6 (York, Durham & Hills of Headwater)	$163	$45
RTO 7 (Bruce Peninsula, Lake Simcoe, Southern Georgian Bay)	$162	$87
RTO 8 (Kawartha & Northumberland)	$141	$53
RTO 9 (South Eastern Ontario)	$193	$63
RTO 10 (Ottawa & Countryside)	$312	$82
RTO 11 (Haliburton Highlands to Ottawa Valley)	$138	$44
RTO 12 (Muskoka, Parry Sound, Algonquin Park)	$167	$43
RTO 13 (Northern Ontario Tourism Region)	$286	$76

Source: Regional Tourism Profiles, Ontario Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sport, 2010.

Lack of resources and education were also identified as a weakness during in-market research. Low awareness of services and business development opportunities can make it difficult for business owners across the food tourism value chain to connect, build relationships and improve their tourism offerings.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Strengthen local agri and food supply chain (see Chapter 8a)
- Expand *Simply Local* program (see Chapter 8b)
- Business development including education and workshops (see Chapter 9)
- Expand equestrian tourist-facing offerings
- Package multi-experience activities to increase economic impact of tourists
- Develop a Local Ambassador program
- Establish Halton as a premier picnicking destination (see Chapter 8d)
- Expand local food and drink options at attractions, festivals and accommodations
- Increase heritage programming at agricultural and culinary attractions and events
- Promote region's wealth of budget and family friendly attractions
- Increase number of businesses offering an authentic "taste of place"
- RBC Canadian Open (July 2013), Epic Tour Halton (Sept 2013), Pan Am Games (2015)
- Encourage private sector investments in tourism infrastructure (e.g. sponsorships)
- Increase promotion of Halton as a four season destination (see Chapter 8e)

Note: Please see Chapter 7 for Expanded Opportunities & Recommendations.

The *2007 Culinary Travel Survey* conducted by the Travel Industry Association (TIA), in partnerships with the World Food Travel Organization (formerly ICTA), and *Gourmet* magazine recommended that travel providers and destinations work together to offer immersion in a regional culture, not only through local food and drink, but also through

hotel experiences, retail outlets and leisure activities.

With over 100 festivals, attractions and accommodations in Halton showing at least some degree of local commitment and a considerable number of farms offering agritourism experiences, there is a good foundation across the food tourism value chain from which to develop packages and signature experiences. Along with improving the local food and drink offerings at accommodations, these represent opportunities to increase overall time spent in the region, as well as overnight and daily visitor spending.

Analysis of established festivals and events running throughout the year should be performed through the lens of agri and food tourism before creating new event programming. Exit surveys at existing regional festivals and events (e.g. The Sound of Music Festival) could be handed out to gauge attendees' interest in local food and drink. If the results support increasing local food and drink offerings, efforts should be directed to improving the commitment to local sourcing at these festivals and events first. One benefit to working within these festivals and events is that they already have infrastructure in place.

Opportunities exist to improve existing products and experiences. From the inventory, 110 agri and/or food tourism *"followers*" could be coached to move into the "*leader*" category. Similarly, 211 agri and/or food tourism *"subscribers"* of businesses could be coached to improve their market readiness. In many cases, these "*subscriber*" rated businesses are doing some local sourcing already but are simply not promoting this. In both instances, business development workshops and education can help business owners incorporate more "tastes of place" and see the value in doing so.

Halton Region is home to over 500,000 people and is one of the fastest growing regions in the country, with a population increase of 14.2% from 2006 to 2011 (*Statistics Canada*). Community Development Halton reported that in 2005, 39% of households earned over $100,000, an increase of 7% from 2000. As the *2006 TAMS* report indicated, there is a positive correlation between income and participation in culinary activities. Given Halton's local demographics and momentum from engaged stakeholders, the region is well suited to integrate a Local Ambassador component into its local food program. Consumer education and improved promotion of local sourcing businesses would help facilitate this addition.

THREATS

- Residential growth and conversion pressure
- Regulatory barriers and over-regulation of farmland
- Out of region agricultural incentives
- Aging farming population and succession planning
- Competition from other destinations
- Long term viability of Mohawk Racetrack and equestrian events
- Decline in bed and breakfast accommodations

Halton's population growth rate from 2006 to 2011 is more than double the provincial average and is the second fastest growing region in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (*Statistics Canada*) With the fastest growing community (Milton) in the country, residential development puts pressure on the preservation of farm and rural land.

Urban sprawl is also an environmental concern. Some residents have been vocal detractors to the growth of tourism assets, citing concerns over noise, traffic and road closures.

In-market research and interviews have identified concern that agricultural incentives in communities within close proximity are persuading new and existing farmers to settle outside the region. Stakeholder interviews have also addressed the concern that Halton is one of the most regulated destinations due to the region's significant conservation lands, the escarpment, federal and provincial growth targets and policy. Specifically, policies around succession planning make it difficult for farmers to make changes to their farm or to expand their on-farm experiences without incurring high development costs.

As the economic value of developing agri and food tourism is being acknowledged and growing in popularity, countries from around the world and regions within Ontario represent direct competition for Halton Region. Regions with more established agri and food tourism sectors are better positioned to attract this lucrative tourism demographic. Working collectively and collaboratively within Halton is critical to creating a competitive and compelling offering.

Categorical Perspective & SWOT Analyses

EAT™ results and comprehensive SWOT analyses were also completed for each of the following categories:

- Accommodations
- Attractions
- Equine Experiences
- Culinary Schools
- Farms, Orchards, Pastures and Food Artisans
- Farmers' Markets
- Festivals
- Restaurants
- Retailers (with local food and/or drink offerings)
- Wineries, Breweries, Cideries and Distilleries

This information can be found in Appendix F. OCTA strongly recommends that this information be closely reviewed by Halton Region staff and stakeholders involved in agritourism product development to ensure that challenges and opportunities within each business category are clearly understood and addressed or leveraged for maximum potential success in new product development and packaging initiatives.

7. OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While Halton has the benefit of many natural assets such as prime agricultural land, stunning landscapes, conservation areas, a strong agricultural heritage and enthusiastic stakeholders, there is still much work to be done for the Region to reach its full potential as an agri and food tourism destination.

The Experience Assessment and SWOT Analysis (see Chapter 5) revealed many opportunities for future development as well as areas for improvement. The most critical key to success is establishing clear objectives, prioritizing opportunities and mapping out realistic plans to achieve them.

Recommendation Criteria

The following are some general guidelines and questions that were considered when prioritizing opportunities and recommendations for Halton Region.

Meeting Halton Region's Objectives

Halton Region identified their primary objective for this project as contributing to strengthening agriculture through agri and food tourism development. The recommendations are intended to make significant contributions to achieving this objective.

MARKET READINESS

The experience assessment ratings delivered by the Experience Assessment Tool (EAT™) were developed to help guide Halton Region and agri and food tourism businesses in the region towards agri and food tourism success. Businesses rated as *"champions"* and *"leaders"* are currently meeting and/or exceeding the expectations of agri and food tourists (and locals). *"Follower"* and *"subscriber"* rated businesses must work towards improving their offering/experience in order to best represent their business and the region to potential agri and food tourists.

Premature product development can do more harm than good. A critical mass of market ready businesses and experiences are required to successfully develop sustainable products and a leading destination - there is only one chance to make a first impression. Moving forward with product development before businesses are ready to receive tourists and locals will leave a lasting negative impression. Unsuccessful product development will also deter participating businesses from staying involved and new businesses from getting involved in the future. For this reason, the bulk of recommendations for Year 1 focus on stakeholder education and networking to lay the foundation for strong product development going forward.

Key Questions:

- Are there a significant number of businesses that are market ready and able to confidently deliver the idea?

- Are the market ready businesses represented across the value chain and the geography of the region?

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The critical components to successful destination and product development are engagement, communication and education. Businesses, products or experiences that are not yet market ready must begin with engagement and education in order to reach market readiness. If the stakeholders do not understand objectives, what's expected of them or how to deliver, they and the Region will not achieve the desired outcome.

Key Questions:

- Have clear objectives and plans been set?
- What degree of stakeholder education and engagement is required for activation?

RESOURCES

Many destinations and businesses have very limited resources (financial, labour and otherwise) and Halton is no exception. Even if there is a great opportunity with market ready businesses that want to participate, a lack of resources to lead, manage and execute the development of this product will end with disappointing results.

Key Questions:

- What the human resource requirements are to execute product development?
- What are the financial resource requirements?

EASE OF EXECUTION

Ideas that are complicated to execute have a tendency to either not get done or not get done well. Intricate execution is also typically resource intensive from a labour and financial perspective and may lead to unforeseen problems. This is not to say that a great idea shouldn't be pursued even if it is more complicated to execute, only that there is a need to plan accordingly.

AUTHENTIC "TASTE OF PLACE" or EXPERIENCE

At the heart of successful agri and food tourism destinations is the authenticity of experiences and local tastes. OCTA considered which recommendations and products would help differentiate Halton Region from other destinations.

Key Questions:

- What are the authentic experiences/tastes offered in Halton Region?
- What differentiates Halton Region from others?
- Which products could be developed to showcase these authentic experiences/tastes?

Opportunities and Recommendations

Drawing on the EAT™ results, SWOT analysis other market research and the above recommendation criteria, the following outlines prioritized opportunities that are (1) fundamental for building a sustainable agri and food tourism foundation and (2) have the ability to enhance and improve Halton's agritourism offerings in the short to medium term. Each recommendation contains a brief description, prioritization level (see below), and identifies resource requirements and potential timing.

PRIORITIZATION LEVELS:

#1: Highest priority - for immediate development based on the contribution to Halton's objective as well as consideration of the other criteria points. This recommendation is a necessity for building a strong foundation for ongoing successful agri and food tourism development.

#2. High priority - plays an important role in agri and food tourism development.

#3. Medium priority - either for longer term or less urgent present/mid term development. Recommendations at this level may meet some of the criteria but are not a requirement for agri and food tourism in the Region.

#4. Low priority - for potential development at some point in the future.

Recommendations fall under three main categories:

1. Educate & Engage
2. Fundamental Product Development
3. Enhanced Product Development

1. EDUCATE & ENGAGE

Fundamental to successful destination and product development are engagement, and education. In particular for Halton, education and engagement are required to:

- Improve the local food supply chain to increase the number of channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products
- Increase the number of market ready agri and food tourism businesses and products.

It is recommended that the Region take an active role in engaging and educating agritourism stakeholders in support of the above objectives by offering a series of networking events, seminars, toolkits and resources. While engagement and education is an ongoing effort, it is recommended that the Region place particular importance on this initiative in Year 1 to help lay the foundation for ongoing successful product development.

Tactic #1: Facilitate Direct Procurement Partnerships (DPPs) between farmers and chefs (and between businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain) (Priority 1)

Successful agri and food tourism destinations must have the ability to deliver local food and drink to tourists and locals. A strong supply chain is the foundation to success.

In Halton Region, significant challenges in getting local farm products to restaurants, festivals, events, attractions and consumers were identified. There is a need to develop short, medium and long-term requirements to successfully develop a sustainable solution and fix this gap in the supply chain.

This should include:

a) Farmer-Chef Networking Events and/or Local Food Tourism Summit (See Chapter 8a)
b) Workshops: Direct Procurement Partnerships (DPPs) for Producers (See Chapter 9)
c) Workshops: Direct Procurement Partnerships (DPPs) for Restaurants (See Chapter 9)
d) Explore, develop and facilitate implementation of tools and strategies to support DPPs, including: Online marketplaces, Web-based ordering systems, Local Food Distribution Co-operatives, Centralized venues, Regional aggregators (See Chapter 8a)
e) Facilitate the implementation of a Regional Food Hub Distribution Model (Conduct feasibility study via *Rural Agricultural Strategy*) (See Chapter 8a)

Human Resources

- Host networking and/or information sessions (see below)
- Explore, develop and facilitate implementation DPP strategies

Financial Resources

- Funds for hosting events
- Potential funds for strategy/tool development

A detailed business plan for rebuilding the supply chain is presented in Chapter 8a) Local Food Supply Chain. There are several supply chain models outlined in this section, with appropriate human and financial resources identified for each model.

Tactic #2: Facilitate (and/or promote) a series of educational seminars, workshops and toolkits for agritourism value chain stakeholders to improve market-readiness

AGRITOURISM VALUE CHAIN WORKSHOPS (Priority 1)

Workshops and toolkits covering a number of topics, including:

- Customer Service/Accessibility Standards
- Local Food Marketing
- General Marketing – Promotion, Social Media & Media Relations
- Value-Adding
- Experience Development

Business stakeholders require some guidance and coaching on how to meet the expectations of agri and food tourists. The above workshops would address some of the challenges identified through the Experience Assessment. Of particular importance is supporting agritourism value chain businesses with new experience development within their existing operations. As an example, the Canadian Tourism Commission offers workshops that speak directly to experience development utilizing the extensive consumer research complete by Environics. Additional workshop availability is provided in Chapter 9.

These workshops that apply across the entire agritourism value chain can be delivered in conjunction with sector specific workshops (outlined below). As an example, a workshop could include a 90-minute session specifically for farmers, that is followed by a 90-minute experience development session.

Through workshops and education, businesses and stakeholders can be empowered to develop products and experiences. Potential products include the Pumpkin Path, Harvest Halton Event, picnic packages and the leveraging of Halton's outdoor experiences across the four seasons, all of which will be outlined later in the report.

FARMER SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS (Priority 1)

There are a number of pre-existing workshops being offered that the Region could facilitate for the agricultural community. Working in partnership with various departments in the Region a schedule to deliver these workshops for the agricultural sector should be developed and implemented. A list of available workshops and programs are outlined further in this report. Recommended topics to cover with Farmers specifically, include:

- Agricultural Business Management
- Risk Management & Liability
- Accessibility

ACCOMMODATION SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS (Priority 1)

This sector requires considerable help in creating market ready businesses but doesn't necessarily require significant capital investment. Halton Region should consider working with the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) to develop service excellence and instruction for businesses on how to offer a unique expression of Halton (focus on building the offering of Halton products into their food and beverage programs).

Note: The Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) 3 already offers this program. In these cases, Halton Region should promote the program to stakeholders and encourage attendance.

Accommodation providers should also be included in the Local Food Summit and Experience Development workshops to support the development of new partnerships/experiences.

RETAILER, RESTAURANT, ATTRACTION, FESTIVAL and EVENT and/or SPECIFIC WORKSHOPS (Priority 1)

- Sourcing Local Food

The following resources apply to all workshops/tool kits:

Human Resources:

- Organize and facilitate workshops (options outlined in workshop section further in this report)
- Create toolkit for accommodation stakeholders interested in growing their agri and food tourism offerings

Financial Resources:

- Funds for hosting workshops
- Funds to develop toolkit

2. FUNDAMENTAL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

There is a significant opportunity for Halton Region to work with existing market ready and near market ready businesses to develop new agri and food tourism experiences that will help put Halton Region on the map as a bona fide agri and food tourism destination.

New experience development requires a strong leader to engage stakeholders, develop a sustainable business plan, and coordinate execution and promotion. In some cases, leaders can come from the grass roots level with minimal facilitation required from the Region. In other cases, it is recommended that the Region take a leadership position at least until the experience is well developed with a successful couple of years in-market. At this point, control over the experience should be transferred to a leading stakeholder to allow the Region to focus on developing additional experiences.

The tactics described below outline immediate or near-term new product development opportunities for which it is recommended the region take on a leadership or strong facilitative role.

Tactic #3: Lead or facilitate the development, execution and/or promotion of five new experiences leveraging existing regional assets and market ready* businesses in the short-medium term to establish Halton as an agri and food tourism destination

**Recognizing existing market ready businesses and identifying businesses with areas for improvement must be done before product development can occur. This*

preliminary assessment is essential to creating realistic timelines and managing expectations.

PUMPKIN PATH/PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (Priority 1)

Designed to celebrate the pumpkin/harvest season in the Halton Region for the month of October, the Trail will attract visitors to the Region, encourage the promotion and sourcing of local Halton pumpkins and help to strengthen Halton's agri and food tourism offerings. It has been recommended that the Region play an active role in the development and marketing of this tourism product. See Chapter 8c for more information.

Human Resources:

- Facilitate stakeholder meetings
- Organize and facilitate information session
- Develop a media relations strategy *(media optimization is outlined later in this section)*
- Host media familiarization tours (FAMs)

Financial Resources

- Funds for hosting meetings/sessions
- Funds to develop PR strategy
- Funds for promotional/marketing materials
- Funds for hosting media FAMs
- Potential funds for website development/maintenance
- Potential funds to hire new staff member in charge of product development *(note: this could also be a volunteer position)*

A detailed business plan for developing a Pumpkin Path in Halton is presented in Section 8c) Pumpkin Path/Product Development.

HARVEST HALTON EVENT (Priority 1)

Harvest Halton is envisaged as a one-day signature culinary event in early October featuring local chefs and farmers at Country Heritage Park. The goals of the event were defined to as celebrating the harvest season, highlighting the food culture in the region, creating local ambassadors and creating buzz in the media and food community to attract visitors to the Region. The event would have a connection to the Pumpkin Trail. It has been recommended that the Region of Halton take a leadership role in establishing and executing this event. See Chapter 8d for more information.

PICNIC DESTINATION (Priority 1)

Halton's extensive conservation and waterfront areas present a unique platform to showcase local food and drink. In order to create a signature picnic program featuring authentic "tastes of place", businesses and stakeholders from across the tourism value chain must be engaged. Rebuilding the supply chain is key to ensuring Halton's local products will be showcased through this program.

Human Resources:

- Host workshops for all conservation partners, museums , retailers and other interested tourism stakeholders to talk about creating a picnic program to run all four seasons
- Host workshops to help interested businesses connect with local food and drink suppliers/farmers
- Create toolkit for interested businesses to initiate picnic programming
- Develop marketing and promotional materials to identify picnic partners
- Potentially, create map of picnic partners/sites in the Region (or incorporate picnic program into *Simply Local* program)

Financial Resources:

- Funds for hosting workshops
- Potential funds for marketing and promotional materials

A detailed business plan for creating a picnic program in Halton is presented in Chapter 8e) Picnic Program Product Development & Marketing Campaign.

EQUESTRIAN SECTOR PACKAGING (Priority 1)

Creating products and packages within the Equestrian sector first require hosting an introduction to agritourism workshop for the sector. The workshop should define how the stakeholders in the sector can develop their agri tourism offering. It is further recommended that particular efforts be made in connecting the equestrian sector with other value chain businesses to encourage the development of unique packages. The connections could take place as part of the regional agri and food tourism summit described earlier.

Halton Region should also consider developing a toolkit for the equestrian sector to support their agri and food tourism development.

Human Resources:

- Organize and facilitate workshops
- Create toolkit for equestrian stakeholders interested in growing their agri and food tourism offerings

Financial Resources:

- Funds for hosting workshops
- Funds to develop toolkit

FOUR SEASON DESTINATION (Priority 1)

Increased promotion of Halton Region as a four-season destination is necessary. It is recommended that Halton Region facilitate the development of new partnerships, experiences and packages that leverage Halton's unique seasonal and year-round

offerings. This should begin with hosting a workshop and networking session for market-ready businesses and facilitate product development.

Human Resources

- Organize and facilitate workshops
- Host a networking event for businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain
- Potentially, create marketing/promotional materials

Financial Resources

- Funds for hosting workshops
- Funds for hosting networking events
- Potential funds for marketing/promotional materials

A detailed business plan is presented in Chapter 8f) Four-Season Destination Product Development & Marketing.

FOOD TRUCK EVENT (Priority 2)

As Halton develops agri and food tourism products/experiences, consideration should be given to events/experiences that have proven successful in other destinations and that could be brought to the Region.

For an event such as Food Truck Eats, there is minimum investment and no infrastructure required to execute this event. As participating trucks will deliver the experience, all that is required of Halton Region is a permitted venue and promotion through social media channels.

LEVERAGE EMERGING TRENDS (Priority 3)

As competition for tourism dollars increases among destinations, it is important for Halton Region to be aware of emerging trends, both provincially and worldwide. Identified trends include: Health and Wellness, Sustainability, Customization, Demand for Authentic Experiences and Changing Demographics.

While current consumer trends and motivations should always be taken into considered when developing products/experiences, resources should not be directed to leveraging these trends at the expense of other priorities.

CYCLING/ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT (Priority 4)

While cycling/adventure is a natural fit for Halton given t he region's unique assets and the upcoming Epic Tour, resources should not be directed to this at the expense of other agri and food tourism priorities. In addition, improving the local food and drink offerings in Halton has the added benefit of increasing the desirability of Halton Region to adventure and eco-tourists as recent studies have demonstrated that eco-tourists are motivated by discovering local products and seek authentic experiences/tastes.

3. ENHANCED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

There is also an opportunity for Halton to lead or facilitate the improvement or enhancement of existing products to increase their relevance to agri and food tourists. Enhanced product development will also occur in future for all new products and experiences recommended as part of Fundamental Product Development.

The following outlines key products for which an Enhanced Product Development opportunity exists as well as opportunities for enhancing products generally.

Tactic #4: Enhance existing products (and/or their promotion) to increase their relevance and appeal to agri and food tourists, specifically:

LOCAL FOOD PROGRAM (Priority 1)

While Halton's *Simply Local* program has identified agritourism products and experiences in the Region, opportunities exist to expand this initiative to include other businesses that offer local food and/or drink. This includes restaurants, retailers, attractions and accommodations.

Enhancing Halton's *Simply Local* program begins by assessing the agri and food tourism products/experiences currently being offered in the Region. Coupled with the opportunities/gaps identified in the SWOT analysis, this assessment will help *Simply Local* stakeholders determine appropriate criteria and guidelines for businesses to be included in the program.

Human Resources

- Engage stakeholders and host information sessions
- Offer/facilitate workshops (outlined below) for businesses who want to achieve market readiness/improve their agri and food tourism offerings
- Establish criteria and guidelines for accreditation and who will monitor them

Financial Resources

- Funds for hosting sessions/workshops
- Funds for promotional/marketing materials
- Funds for re-branding/logo design

MEDIA OPTIMIZATION (Priority 3)

Once new products/experiences have been developed there is a great opportunity to engage with local, regional, provincial and national media to share Halton's stories. Working in partnership with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership (OTMPC) and partners such as OCTA, Regional Tourism Organization 3 (RTO3) and the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), the Region can arrange for media familiarization tours (also known as FAMs) to build media awareness for new products and experiences.

Human Resources:

- Develop a media relations strategy
- Build media contact list (or engage PR firm)
- Work with stakeholders on how to host media (perhaps even offer workshop on media relations for your business stakeholders)
- Host media FAMs

Financial Resources:

- Funds to develop PR strategy
- Funds to host stakeholder media training/workshops
- Funds to host media FAMs

SPONSORSHIP PLANS (Priority 3)

Once Halton Region has developed concepts for products/experiences, sponsorships to develop financially sustainable programs should be considered. With many events and products – early sponsorship attraction can be challenging as there isn't a "track record" to show the potential sponsor. In the ever-competitive world of attracting sponsorship funding, success will rest in having a strong proposal with sound deliverables that connect the sponsor with their desired consumer.

Human Resources:

- Develop a sponsorship strategy (or outsource to a sponsorship firm)
- Build a sponsorship target list (or engage firm to manage sponsorship)
- Manage sponsorship relationships and deliverables *(note: this can be time consuming – HR should be factored into sponsorship expenses)*

Financial Resources:

- Funds to develop sponsorship strategy

AGRICULTURAL FAIRS (Priority 4)

While there are several fairs in Halton Region that could be coached to improve their local food and beverage offerings and programming, these events primarily draw locals (rather than tourists). Resources should not go against this development at the expense of other agri food tourism priorities.

In the future, Halton Region may wish to facilitate some education or workshops for local fair organizers to improve the local food and drink offerings at events.

PAN/PARAPAN AM GAMES 2015 (Priority 3)

A significant number of international and local tourists will be driven to the Region to experience this world-class event. The 2015 Pan Am Games are an excellent opportunity for the Region to demonstrate its strength as an agri and food tourism destination.

At minimum, the businesses in the value chain should be made aware of potential opportunities and provided with information and education to ensure market readiness. There is also an opportunity to create an event designed to connect businesses in the value chain so that they can create their own packages and programming.

Note: Halton Region should coordinate Pan/Parapan Am Games activities with the Town of Milton.

Human Resources:

- Develop a volunteer committee to connect with Pam Am games team, lead, set participation criteria, educate and monitor
- Encourage local businesses that are participating to work toward market readiness, collaborate with others to develop unique experiences and execute

Financial Resources:

- Funds for hosting meetings/workshops
- Potential funds for developing awareness/marketing campaign for stakeholders

RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: CRITICAL PATH

Priority 1	
Priority 2	
Priority 3	
Priority 4	

Note: Priority 2,3 and 4 items should not be moved ahead with until Priority 1 opportunities and recommendations have been addressed. These recommendations are expanded upon in Chapters 8 and 9. It is recommended that other opportunities identified in Chapter 6 be revisited once foundational elements are in place.

IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3+
EDUCATE & ENGAGE			
Improve Local Supply Chain			
Increase # of Market Ready Businesses			
Facilitate DPPs			
Agritourism Value Chain Workshops			
Farmer Specific Workshops			
Accommodation Specific Workshops			
Retailer, Restaurant, Attraction, Festival and/or Event Specific Workshops			
Regional Food Hub Facilitation	Feasibility Study	Implementation	
FUNDAMENTAL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT			
Pumpkin Trail			
Harvest Halton Event			
Picnic Program	Engage Relevant Stakeholders	Facilitate Packaging & Promotion	
Four Season Program	Engage Relevant Stakeholders	Facilitate Packaging & Promotion	
Equestrian Packaging	Engage Relevant Stakeholders	Facilitate Packaging & Promotion	
Food Truck Event			
Cycling/Adventure Development			
Leverage Emerging Trends			
ENHANCED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT			
Simply Local Program Enhancement	Criteria Development	Implementation	
Media Optimization			
Sponsorship Plan			
Agricultural Fairs			
Pan Am Games			

8A. LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

PRIORITY: 1

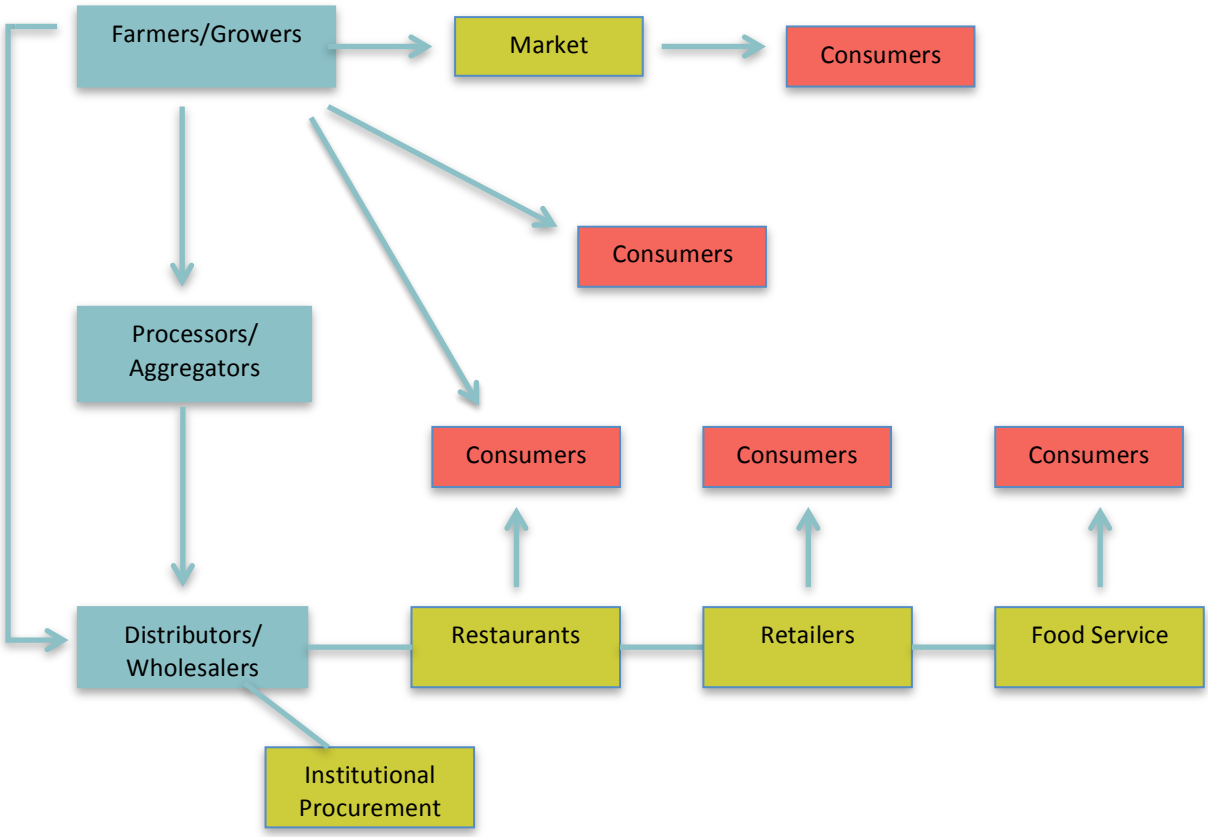
TIMING: 2013 – Educate and Engage (Farmer-Chef Networking), Regional Food Hub Feasibility Study
2014-2016: Educate and Engage, Direct Procurement Partnership Tool Development

ROLE OF THE REGION: Educate and Engage *(outlined below)*

INTRODUCTION

The local food supply chain presents a variety of outlets for agri and food tourists and consumers to experience a taste of Halton (see below). From sipping on a craft beer at a restaurant in Oakville or at the brewery itself, to enjoying local strawberries at a Halton festival or partaking in maple syrup demonstrations at a regional conservation area, there are many "taste of place" opportunities in Halton. There are also many avenues to expand Halton's local agri and food tourism offerings. In order to do this the value chain between local producers, processors and wholesalers to consumers must be strengthened.

Fig. 4 Functional Food System Supply Chain



Based on the SWOT analysis, it is evident that while Halton does have a wealth of businesses that are doing local sourcing, this sourcing comes for the most part from within the province and not the region. This is especially true in the restaurant category, where only four per cent of local sourcing businesses identified "Halton sourced" ingredients on their menu. The EAT™ inventory of local food and drink retailers, attractions, accommodations and festivals and events, shows a similar disparity. These gaps speak to disconnect between Halton farmers and their potential distribution channels, a weakness that was also identified during in market research and stakeholder interviews.

Agri and food tourists seek authentic tastes and experiences of place - this is their primary motivator when choosing a destination. In order to establish Halton as a food tourism region, there must be unique regional offerings available across the food tourism value chain. Restaurants are uniquely positioned to capture a greater share of the increasing demand for local food, which makes the gap between farmers and chefs one of particular concern. Restaurants are the primary place that food tourists experience a region's local food and drink and inform their perception of the region as a culinary destination.

Increasing the percentage and range of local food and drink offerings at Halton restaurants and improving the promotion of these Halton sourced ingredients are two ways to elevate businesses' ratings. These changes can result in a "*subscriber*" rated restaurant moving into the "*follower*" category and in some cases, a "*follower*" moving into a "*leader*" position (categories referred to in the EAT™ inventory).

WHAT DOES THE LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN LOOK LIKE IN HALTON?

Rebuilding and strengthening a supply chain begins by completing an inventory of all products available in the region, as well as looking at aggregators, distributers, processors and potential end-buyers. Per the 2011 Census of Agriculture released by Statistics Canada, there are 468 farms in Halton Region.

The total number of farms in Halton is significantly lower than other counties and regions in the province (see Appendix C) and represents a 17.9% reduction from 2006. From 2001 to 2011, the number of soy operations has increased by 40% while dairy operations (-55.6%) and cattle operations (-71.9%) have seen a significant decline (*Statistics Canada*). Halton's farms account for 2.8% of the total number of farms in Western Ontario and less than 1% of the total farms province-wide. As of 2011, Halton's total farmland is 79,567 acres (*Statistics Canada*).

While Halton's *total number* of farms is in decline, its average farm *size* is increasing (from 122 acres in 1976 to 170 acres in 2011). This is in line with agriculture trends across the province, with fewer operators being responsible for larger farming operations. Specifically, Oakville and Burlington have experienced increases in farm size, which are most likely due to the available rural land being rented for cash crop operations (*Sustainable Halton: An Agricultural Evaluation*, 2). Cash cropping is most commonly done on larger parcels of farmland.

WHICH SPECIFIC CROPS ARE HALTON FARMERS GROWING?

While the total number of farms may be shrinking, there are still a wide variety of available products to support the local food supply chain. These products include:

- Strawberries
- Apples
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Pumpkins
- Peppers
- Raspberries
- Elderberries
- Plums
- Edamame
- Ostrich
- Jams
- Flowers
- Blueberries
- Squash
- Celery
- Brussels Sprouts
- Carrots
- Herbs
- Pears
- Melons
- Grapes
- Turnips
- Lamb
- Trees/Shrubs
- Seeds
- Corn
- Beets
- Zucchini
- Asparagus
- Eggs
- Beef
- Beans
- Currants
- Potatoes
- Cauliflower
- Goat Cheese
- Preserves
- Christmas Trees
- Peas
- Onions
- Cabbage
- Mushrooms
- Chicken
- Lettuce
- Radishes
- Rhubarb
- Kale
- Garlic
- Lavender
- Pickles

There are also a number of processors, manufacturers and distributors in Halton, including Fearman's Pork Inc., Deboer's Poultry, Sargent Farms, Monaghan Mushrooms Ltd., Ontario Halal Meat Packers, Chudleigh's Ltd., Paletta International Corporation, Saputo (Neilson) Dairy and Gordon Food Services. Located in Burlington, Fearman's Pork Inc. is the oldest continuously operating pork processing plant in Canada. While the company is an important economic driver for the region, employing over 1,000 workers according to the Halton Region Economic Development Division's 2013 report, its pork is supplied from farms outside the region.

DISTRIBUTION CHALLENGES

With restaurants serving as a primary attractor and destination for agri and food tourists, reducing the distribution gap between farmers and chefs is a significant step to improving a region's agri and culinary tourism offerings.

For the potential of restaurants to be realized, these distribution challenges to the local food supply chain must first be addressed. Through in market and stakeholder interviews, several challenges around connecting farmers and chefs were addressed. These included:

1. Scheduling issues
   - farmers and chefs have opposite/conflicting schedules

2. Distribution
   - farmers may not be able to leave the farm or lack manpower to deliver directly to the restaurant
   - chefs may not have the capacity to pick up produce, making existing suppliers who deliver directly to the restaurant more desirable
   - unlike many other agri and culinary destinations, there aren't any regional aggregators that are able to bridge the gap e.g. 100km Foods

3. Limited awareness of available farms to source from

4. Lack of networking opportunities and/or lack of connectivity
   - e.g. no farmer to chef meet and greets
   - because of the reliance on mass distribution supply chains, many farmers and chefs aren't closely connected
   - many are uncertain as to how to build the relationship and then how to adjust their businesses accordingly to accommodate the "localized" approach

5. Price
   - farmers perceive that chefs will not pay the required prices for their product
   - chefs perceive that farmers are charging too much (as compared with their existing suppliers)
   - some chefs perceive it is cheaper to source from other parts of Ontario

6. Time
   - *chefs perceive that coordinating orders with farmers is more time-consuming as there is no central ordering system to work from*

7. Product Availability
   - seasonality of Halton farms makes year-round sourcing difficult
   - very difficult to source all ingredients from Halton (e.g. limited pork and dairy producers to choose from)
   - as with any local sourcing, chefs have to be prepared to adjust their menu according to the farmer's harvest. It is unpredictable and of course is dependent on nature.

Challenges surrounding distribution are primary determinants in the success/failure of a direct procurement partnership. Producers and restaurants both want the other party to assume the associated time, labour and equipment costs. Oftentimes, if a producer is unable to deliver their goods directly to the restaurant, the partnership will not go forward. There is also the issue of "restaurant readiness". Many restaurants want their produce pre-washed and ready to go/processed.

Price is a major challenge for local food producers seeking entry into the restaurant market. Restaurants, with their tight margins, are constantly cost comparing local food ingredients to their conventionally sourced counterparts. Additionally, not only are local food producers competing with conventional producers, they are also competing amongst themselves.

The relatively smaller size of some local food operations also puts them at a disadvantage in terms of economies of scale. Thus, the local food producer that wishes to be successful in accessing the restaurant market must implement some kind of value-add into their business model, either by concentrating on specialty or pre-processed products, or by adding value in another way, such as allowing for product customization or an innovative ordering system, as an example.

Product availability and quality are two factors that are insurmountable to local food producers. Due to the effects of seasonality, climatic variability, disease, pests and other growing factors, local food producers are always at a disadvantage when compared to the globalized food system that provides most products, with certain

quality parameters, on a year-round basis. Restaurants and food retailers, motivated by consumer demand, need to undergo a shift in their perception and valuing of the food system in order for local food producers to compete and create local champions for Halton's local food system.

DIRECT PROCUREMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Direct procurement partnerships (DPP) between local food producers and restaurants are one method of making local food more accessible to visitors and local residents in Halton Region. A number of strategies exist that facilitate the formation and maintenance of these types of partnerships, including grower-chef meet and greet events, web-based ordering systems, co-operative selling on the part of growers, distribution intermediaries, and other measures that either enable producers to better market their goods or that enable restaurants to more efficiently source locally.

The strategies outlined in this section are aimed at increasing access to local ingredients, while also addressing certain challenges.

Successful Strategies

A review of common approaches to facilitating direct procurement partnerships across North America reveals a set of best practices for connecting local food producers and restaurants:

1. An online marketplace where producers and restaurants can connect;
2. Web-based ordering forms to streamline the ordering process;
3. Centralized trade and distribution centers where producers and restaurants can exchange in a face-to-face manner;
4. Farmers' markets and other venues as food distribution points;
5. Partnerships and/or co-operatives formed between several farms to make retailing and distribution more efficient;
6. Intermediary local food distribution businesses/regional aggregators; and,
7. Incorporation of a local food agenda into conventional distribution system

Examples of each of these approaches can be found in operation throughout Ontario, across the country and internationally.

Networking Events:

Events focused specifically on facilitating networking between local food producers, buyers and other industry stakeholders are a crucial part of developing a successful and forward-thinking agri and food tourism program. Participants of the "Farmer to Chef Meet & Greet" hosted by OCTA in 2011 were asked to comment on the benefit of these events. Their responses demonstrate the fundamental function these events perform:

"Made new business connections…"
"This was very beneficial to my business…"
"Met producers I had wanted to meet for some time"
"Made beneficial producer to producer connections"

It is essential that all the individual businesses involved be brought together to form the relationships that will ultimately lead to the creation of innovative and unique food tourism experiences unique to Halton Region.

NETWORKING EVENTS	
WHY?	- To introduce the concept of DPPs to stakeholders - To facilitate partnerships between and buyers - To showcase successful strategies being practiced in the region - A relatively low cost component of the program
WHEN?	Networking events should be held early on in the process of program development, and be held on a recurring basis (either seasonally or annually). Furthermore, these events must be scheduled at a time that is convenient for producers to attend (i.e. not during the growing season).
WHO?	Hosted by Halton Region (is important that these events be hosted at the regional level to reinforce the scope of the program).
HUMAN RESOURCES	Organize and facilitate workshops
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	Funds to cover the cost of the event(s) and outreach

Example: The Portland Farmer-Chef Connection (Portland, Oregon)

Farmer-chef networking events are held in many food tourism destinations in Ontario, as well as further afield. The Portland Farmer-Chef Connection exemplifies the important function these events can play. Hosted by the Portland Chefs Collaborative, the annual sold-out event brings more than 300 chefs, farmers, ranchers, fishers, grocery retailers, processors, specialty food owners and distributers together to make connections and celebrate the variety of great food grown in the area. Events during the day include workshops, networking sessions, product tastings and opportunities for distributors and restaurants to purchase local food.

The Portland Chefs Collaborative's mandate to connect farmers and chefs does not stop at their signature networking event – they also host group meetings, field trips and farm visits throughout the year. The Portland Chefs Collaborative is part of the national-scale Chefs Collaborative, a non-profit chef network that boasts more than 12,000 members nationally and has been working to move the American food landscape in a more sustainable direction since it was founded more than 20 years ago.

Online Marketplaces

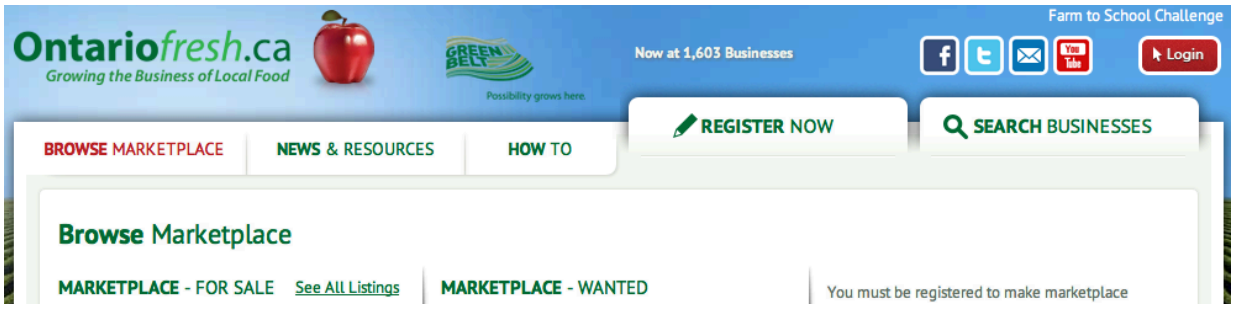
Online marketplaces can connect local food producers and purchasers in an efficient and straightforward way. An online marketplace allows producers to expand their customer base, find a channel for surplus product, and assess demand for new products. For purchasers such as grocery stores, restaurants, caterers and institutions, an online marketplace is a convenient way to connect with local producers.

The relative ease of moving a marketplace to an online format has the potential of increasing local food purchases overall. There are multiple options for product delivery

- producers can take on the responsibility of delivering their products with an added fee or the business could incorporate a delivery service into the business model that is paid for equally by all members. From a tourism perspective, an online marketplace can facilitate the provision of local food to restaurants that are frequented by visitors and local residents.

ONLINE MARKETPLACE	
WHY?	- Convenience of posting and searching listings - Accessible via mobile devices, to a large audience - Easily updated - Few infrastructure requirements
WHEN?	An online marketplace can start small and grow overtime. It can be created at an early stage in program development, acting not only as a marketplace, but also as a networking tool.
WHO?	Rather than development a new marketplace, Halton Region could direct/encourage businesses to work with Greenbelt's OntarioFresh.ca program (outlined below). *OR* Halton Region could contract development out to a hosting service and website management firm. Database requires on-going maintenance.
HUMAN RESOURCES	- Database organization and management - Marketing/promotion to suppliers/purchasers to adopt online ordering system (e.g. OntarioFresh.ca) - Organize and facilitate workshop to instruct farmers on using online marketplace
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	- Funds for website design, hosting and maintenance fees - Funds for workshop hosting

Examples: OntarioFresh.ca, FarmersWeb (US), Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative, Local Orbit (US), Lulus Local Food (US)



The OntarioFresh.ca marketplace, spearheaded by The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, is designed to facilitate the supply of local food between producers and purchases, including restaurants. To register, businesses create a free profile, after which they can begin connecting with other listed businesses posting in the Marketplace.

Here, producers can post 'For Sale' ads for products they have available, while restaurants and food distributors can post 'Wanted' ads for ingredients they are searching for. The Ontariofresh.ca database currently features over 1,600 businesses

that are searchable by Buyer, Seller and Processor. The database is searchable within a kilometer radius, but is currently not searchable by region. Within Halton Region, there are less than twenty businesses listed on this database, the majority of which are wholesalers.

FarmersWeb is an American-based online marketplace for wholesale sellers and buyers. FarmersWeb is not only a listing service - it also handles the purchase transactions for its members. Buyers can only access sellers within 300 miles of their location, keeping the food networks limited geographically, based on the concept of food miles. Resellers are not allowed on the FarmersWeb site and farmers must apply and be approved before selling on the site. Farms are responsible for delivery of the product and can set their own delivery schedule. Wholesale buyers need only sign up online before they can begin shopping – an attractive component of this online marketplace.

The Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative also runs an online marketplace, as part of a networking project for local food producers and consumers. For a $50 membership fee, consumers can join the OVFC and place orders on a monthly basis from over 1,200 listings by local food producers. While consumers who live outside area may join provided they are willing to pick up their orders from an existing pick-up site, producer members must be from the Upper Ottawa Valley in order to sign up.

Producers can update products on their website over an eight day ordering window, after which orders are finalized, collected, sorted and delivered to pick-up sites or directly to consumers. To strengthen the viability of this supply chain model, the OVFC encourages producer members to volunteer at monthly events, sorting product and learning how the system works.

Education for producers and consumers is a key component for these online marketplaces. From the back-end, both Local Orbit and Lulus Local Food provide e-commerce and business management tools for businesses to buy and sell local food. Local Orbit, based out of Michigan, is a web platform that provides customized websites and branding, helping small businesses build local food supply chains. Similarly, Lulus Local Food provides software solutions for farmers markets and operating food hubs from Virginia to Montana.

Web-Based Ordering (by Individual Businesses):

Similar to an online marketplace, individual local food businesses can be encouraged to integrate web-based ordering into their business models. This mechanism allows restaurants and other foodservice businesses to submit orders outside of normal business hours, making direct procurement partnerships more convenient and less disruptive to farm operations.

WEB-BASED ORDERING	
WHY?	- Convenience - Addresses a challenge of direct procurement partnerships (that producers and restaurants do not share the same business hours)
WHEN?	- Once a number of well-established direct procurement partnerships are formed
WHO?	While the specifics of setting up a web-based ordering system would be up to the producer, Halton Region could provide producers with resources about how to go about doing so.

HUMAN RESOURCES	- Organize and facilitate workshop to show individual businesses how to set up ordering system - Develop toolkit instructing businesses how to set up ordering system
WHAT? (Resources, skills)	- Funds for workshop hosting - Funds to develop toolkit

Local Food Distribution Co-operatives:

Distribution co-operatives allow local food producers to share the work involved in bringing products to market, allowing them to redirect time and other resource requirements towards tourism-oriented endeavours. In addition to sharing resources and labour, distribution co-op members can split the costs of purchasing equipment (e.g. a flash freezer) or facilities that allows better processing of their products but that would be too expensive for an individual member to purchase.

Co-ops can take many forms and might involve group selling at farmers' markets, a shared vehicle dedicated to deliveries, and/or a retail space that is managed by all members. Furthermore, when they involve a physical marketplace (which differs from the online marketplace approach listed above), distribution co-ops can become a food tourism attraction in their own right.

DISTRIBUTION CO-OPERATIVES	
WHY?	- Alleviating time and other resources required to bring food products to market - To create a marketplace that is accessible to tourists
WHEN?	Co-operatives evolve overtime. Producers should explore their options early on and begin to explore the concept early on (i.e. at networking events).
WHO?	Managed by co-operative members. Halton Region could facilitate an information session or networking event for interested parties. Halton Region could also arrange for workshops led by successful Ontario co-ops (e.g. Eat Local Sudbury and Ottawa Valley Co-op have presented their models to other regions).
HUMAN RESOURCES	- Organize and facilitate networking event/workshop - Organize and facilitate information session
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	- Funds for networking event/workshop - Funds for information session

Examples: Elmira Produce Co-operative Inc., Quinte Organic Farmers Co-operative, Local Organic Food Co-ops

The Elmira Produce Auction Co-operative Inc. (EPAC) is owned and operated by members of the Mennonite farming community and supports local growers by creating a new market for produce in Waterloo region. The goal of EPAC is to increase family farm revenue by encouraging local farms to diversity into higher value crops like seasonal fruit and produce. The regular wholesale market provides a consistent sales outlet for local farms willing to invest in fruit and vegetable production. The auction is open to the public and a full range of local fruit and produce is sold in wholesale lots. Lot sizes vary from 1/2 bushel and full bushel to pallets and field

bins. There are currently 65 producer members of this wholesale produce auction, the first of its kind in the country.

The Quinte Organic Farmers Co-operative is an example of how producers can work together to overcome the challenges of local food distribution. By selling as a group and sharing labour at different farmers' market, the growers extend the market they would not otherwise be able to access given time and labour limitations. There are currently thirteen members of this co-op, comprised of small family-run farms across Quinte, Prince Edward County, Hastings and Northumberland.

The Local Organic Food Co-ops network is a web-based organization that promotes and provides resources to food co-operatives in Ontario. The resource section of this website has a good amount of information on starting, financing and managing a food co-operatives, as well as access to research on limiting and enabling factors to the formation and success of these collective marketing initiatives.

The logic for selling co-operatively stems from the idea that, worldwide, farmers are not price-setters, but price-takers - meaning that they do not have the power to obtain the price they desire in the open market. By selling co-operatively, farmers control the supply of goods into the market, and demand the price they want.

Centralized Venues as Food Distribution Points:

Farmers' markets, roadside stands and country markets are popular destinations for visitors seeking out "taste of place" experiences, while also acting as venues for connecting growers and chefs.

CENTRALIZED DISTRIBUTION POINTS	
WHY?	- Allowing producers and purchasers to connect face-to-face - Dual-purpose as both a marketplace and a tourist attraction
WHEN?	At any point, whenever there is sufficient interest (i.e. a good number of producers interested in participating, an appropriate venue is available during the growing season and an organizing committee is formed)
WHO?	Run by a committee of stakeholders, including farmers' market organizers, producers, chefs, Regional or city representatives, etc. Halton Region could host networking event between proposed stakeholders to gauge interest and discuss logistics, but stakeholders would primarily run distribution.
HUMAN RESOURCES	- Organize and facilitate networking session - Organize and facilitate information session
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	- Funds for networking event - Funds for information session

Examples: Evergreen Brick Works Farmers' Market, Artisanale Bistro

In Toronto, local residents, chefs and tourists frequent the Evergreen Brick Works Market. Here, chefs can shop for ingredients and connect with new suppliers. Once a partnership is formed, the chef can use the farmers' market as a pick-up location or work with a distribution intermediary to set up delivery for a nominal fee. Chefs from Oliver & Bonacini's Toronto restaurants are often spotted at this weekly market.

The Brick Works Farmers' Markets boasts 65-85 vendors. Photo credit: A.R. English

The model employed by Artisanale Bistro in Guelph and the nearby Whole Circle Farm is a good example of added benefits of forming a direct procurement partnership. Here, the restaurant and the farm have partnered using a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) model, in which the restaurant pre-purchases a share of the farm's harvest. The restaurant is able to access a degree of product customization in this model, by requesting the farm grow certain crops, for example. A bonus for the farm in this exchange is that the restaurant allows Whole Circle Farm to use their parking lot as a pick-up location for other CSA members in the area.

Regional Aggregators:

The difficulty of delivering local food in a manner that accommodates fluctuating volume while at the same time being cost effective has repeatedly been identified as a major challenge to the local food supply chain. Neither producers nor restaurants have the capacity to take on the extra cost and time required to make direct procurement partnerships viable. Regional aggregators are emerging as necessary intermediaries between producers and purchasers of local food, providing delivery services that specialize in the provision of local food on a regional scale.

REGIONAL AGGREGATORS	
WHY?	- Cost of delivery becomes shared between the producer and the purchaser - Only one degree of separation between the point of production and consumption, means that the benefit of direct procurement is not entirely lost
WHEN?	Once local food producers and restaurants begin to make connections, regional aggregators should be introduced to facilitate these relationships (via an independent business, or a co-operative of producers)
WHO?	Independent business, co-operatively Halton Region could organize an information session to present model to stakeholders.
HUMAN RESOURCES	- Organize and facilitate information session
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	- Funds for information session

Examples: 100km Foods, 100 Mile Food Services

100KM FOODS INC.

Making locally produced foods accessible in a manner that is comparable to conventional food sourcing continues to be a challenge. Intermediary businesses have sprung up to meet the demand for more efficient distribution of local food products. Generally, these businesses tend to focus on a particular region or radius, servicing food service businesses such as restaurants and connecting them with food produced in the same region.

The award-winning 100km Foods Inc. was created in 2007 to provide a direct channel for farmers to sell their products to chefs and restaurateurs. Based out of Toronto, 100km Foods Inc. sources from over forty farms and offers 1,500 fresh, locally sourced products (including pawpaw fruit and Northern kiwis) to their customer base. In 2012, the company bought $1M worth of products from their supplier farms (Rabin, 2012).

Serving Southwest Ontario, 100 Mile Food Services aims to improve the local economy, lower food miles and tell the story of farmers and producers. The family-run distribution company serves over forty-five institutions, retailers and restaurants. Identified Halton clients on their website include Spencer's at the Waterfront and La Cucina Ristorante.

Conventional/Mass Distribution 'Buy Local' Policies:

Conventional food distributors are also beginning to play a role in local food distribution. In response to consumer demand, Gordon Food Services and Sysco have both adopted local food procurement policies.

As one of the largest distributers in the country with annual sales upwards of $800M according to the "Ontario's Local Food Champions 2012" report from Greenbelt, Gordon Food Services has the capacity to make a significant impact on Ontario's local food system. In 2011, they launched a strategy to increase distribution of local food and make deeper connections with producers and the broader public sector (BPS). Folded into this strategy is the *Local Made Easy* Campaign, along with new branding and identification of "*Ontario's Own from Gordon Food Service*".

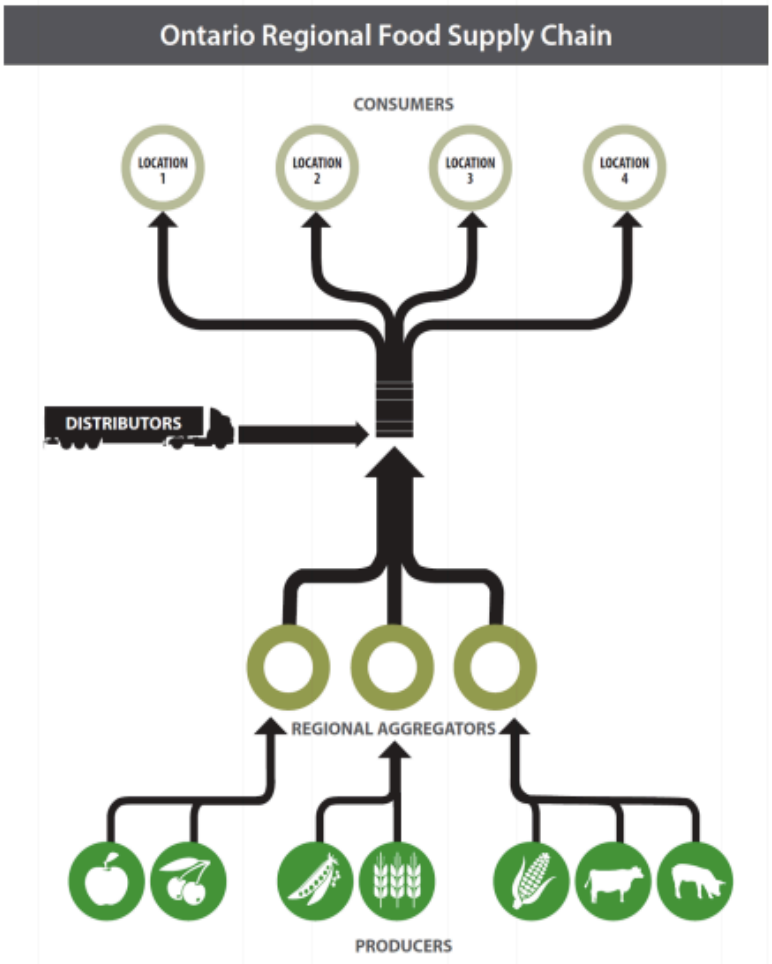
Unfortunately, without a regional aggregator to package and deliver their products to GFS, it is difficult for the small to medium farmers who represent a significant portion of Ontario farms to enter this system. A viable, holistic local food supply chain hinges on farmers, growers and producers being able to reach consumers, including agri and food tourists, along the entirety of the supply chain using numerous distribution channels.

Regional Food Hubs: The Greenbelt Fund

Conventional distribution and regional aggregators are the most common distribution models in Ontario. With the former being prohibitive to the majority of Ontario's farming population and the latter being limited by capacity to expand beyond a limited radius, there exists a need to explore a new form of regional food distribution that unites these models.

The Greenbelt Fund is a not-for-profit organization that has had extensive experience building relationships along the value chain in the food service sector. They recognize the challenges associated with getting more local food to consumers and the communities in which they live and visit.

Fig. 5 Ontario Regional Food Supply Chain



Greenbelt Fund: Regional Food Distribution Pilot Project (2013)

To begin to address the distribution barrier, the Greenbelt Fund will bring both distribution models together – leveraging the efficiencies of large-scale distribution and capitalizing on the product variation and freshness those smaller-scale aggregators provide.

In this new model, regional aggregators would continue to source fresh, locally grown products from their respective regions, and large-scale distributors would continue to provide the supply logistics to deliver the product to customers and clients in the most efficient manner. The result would be a network of distribution points that are interconnected and work collaboratively to get food from farms to customers.

This new model will begin with a pilot project based in the Greater Toronto Area. An advisory committee has been created to act as a resource for the project. Members

include representatives all along the food value chain, as well as academics, logistics specialists, and communication experts. The committee's role is to provide guidance and advice to the project director, as well as assist with identifying key assets and resources needed to expand the project to multiple pilots.

If successful, Greenbelt's food hub pilot program will be expanded to other areas of the province. This model was presented to both the Region and the Halton Agricultural Action Committee (HAAC), where it was well received.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Greenbelt Regional Food Distribution Project would be very well suited to Halton Region and could provide a longer term, more permanent solution to the supply chain and distribution challenges. While it is still in the very early development stages, Halton Region should explore the potential of this recommendation for the future. A Feasibility Study, performed by an outside consultant, should also be undertaken to formally assess and analyze the local food supply chain.

In the immediate future, opportunities exist to strengthen the local food supply chain through farmer-chef meet and greet events and education. During in market research, a common comment from business owners when asked why they did not source from Halton was that they *"did not know of any available Halton farmers".* Networking sessions and workshops can be led by the Region or an outside facilitator at a relatively low cost and would go a long way to establishing connections between local farms and restaurants, retailers, accommodations and food service providers.

Once a relationship between farmers and these new customers is fostered and the demand for local, Halton-sourced food has been identified, the distribution models outlined in this section should be explored as a potential next step. Halton's farmers' markets could be explored as a seasonal distribution center and pick-up option. Requiring voluntary participation, there would be minimal costs associated as the infrastructure is already in place at these sites.

The importance of a regional aggregator must be acknowledged here. Without an intermediary to accumulate and package products from small to medium farms, it will be difficult for the majority of Halton farmers to reach a larger market (e.g. grocery retailers, institutions, chain restaurants). Development of a regional aggregator is recommended if the Region is to strengthen and sustain the local food supply chain.

Existing producers and farmers need the support of the consumers, private business owners, municipalities, advocacy groups, etc. need to work together to overcome these challenges and provide unified solutions. There is a need to raise awareness in the community as a whole about the challenges farmers face with growing and selling goods. An educational booth at the farmers' market could serve this purpose, as well as providing a place for dialogue and feedback from customers.

When a local food supply chain thrives, the results are enjoyed across every channel. Locally grown products and on-farm attractions are of primary interest to agri and food tourists. By strengthening distribution channels and creating new revenue streams for producers, the farms on which these products and experiences are created will remain viable.

8B. ENHANCING THE *SIMPLY LOCAL* PROGRAM

PRIORITY: 1

TIMING: 2013 – Define Membership Criteria, Outreach (Educate and Engage), Branding
2014 – 2016: Monitoring, Certification/Accreditation, Marketing

ROLE OF REGION: Enhanced Product Development (Lead)

INTRODUCTION

A strong local agri and food program is a fundamental building block for creating a thriving agri and food tourism destination. These programs help support sustainable food and farming systems and can be leveraged by events, attractions, trails and other initiatives to promote "Buy Local" campaigns.

Participants in a local agri and food program typically represent market ready businesses that can be tapped for networking events designed to facilitate product development. They can also act as local ambassadors who play a critical part in generating awareness of a region's agri and food tourism assets. This helps to increase visits to the region by tourists and also build local community support.

As demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, agritourists share many of the same motivations for travel as food tourists. Incorporating businesses with local food and drink components can add value to agritourism programs and help cross-promote the various channels where tourists can taste and experience regional agricultural products. Beyond food and drink offerings, these initiatives also showcase the cultural, historical and educational activities that add significant depth to an experience.

This chapter describes best practice agri and food tourism program examples and provides recommendations for developing a food tourism program that builds off of Halton's current *Simply Local* program to (1) incorporate off-farm channels such as restaurants, retailers, and processors who meet defined local-food criteria and (2) increase promotion of the program, both in an effort to increase the relevance, recognition and appeal of *Simply Local* to agri and food tourists.

Note: It is recommended that changes and enhancements to Simply Local *be done in collaboration with current* Simply Local *participants.*

BEST PRACTICES

Savour Ottawa – Ottawa, Ontario

Established in 2007, Savour Ottawa is an award-winning local food initiative that aims to highlight local farmers and recognize local businesses that have shown a commitment to sourcing local food and drink products. Ottawa Tourism, Just Food and the Rural Affairs and Markets Management Offices of the City of Ottawa jointly lead and monitor the program. In addition to certifying members, Savour Ottawa hosts farm tours and tastings and an annual Harvest Table dinner that regularly sells out. In 2010, the program received the Ontario Culinary Tourism Leadership Award at the Ontario Tourism Awards.

Memberships are available for producers, farmers, food service businesses (restaurants, caterers and accommodations), supporters, retailers and microprocessors. If a business meets the membership criteria (outlined in Appendix E) and has paid a membership fee, they become a Savour Ottawa member. Currently, there are over 100 members in the program, including 67 farmers and producers. Member benefits include promotional marketing materials, a profile on the Savour Ottawa website, business development resources and verification of having met Savour Ottawa's criteria for local food. Membership criteria is established by member focus groups and reviewed annually.

Savour Stratford – Stratford, Ontario

Nestled in Perth County, Stratford was named "Canada's Hottest Food Destination" in 2011 by AOL Travel. Savour Stratford is the town's local food and drink initiative, spearheaded by the Stratford Tourism Alliance. In addition to offering culinary getaways and promoting authentic, signature food tourism experiences, Savour Stratford has developed the Savour Stratford Perth County Culinary Festival, a hugely successful event that attracts over 30,000 visitors each fall. Savour Stratford was also the recipient of the 2011 Ontario Culinary Tourism Leadership Award.

Memberships are available for producers, accommodations, restaurants, retailers, food service providers, events, attractions, destinations and associations. Member benefits include a profile on the Visit Stratford website, voting privileges on the Stratford Tourism Alliance Board, Savour Stratford certification, promotional marketing materials and access to business development resources.

taste-real – Guelph-Wellington, Ontario

Formerly known as Guelph Wellington Local Food, taste-real is the newly rebranded local food initiative in Guelph and Wellington County. The program has won numerous awards in the short time it has been in place, including an Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO) Award for Product Development and the 2012 Ontario Culinary Tourism Leadership Award.

Taste-real strives to support local small businesses and farms, build stronger rural communities and help grow Guelph Wellington into a popular destination for agri and food tourists. The program has created a Local Food Map and hosts numerous events, including the Local Food Fest, the Taste-real Field Dinner, the Rural Romp & Source It Here: Wellington's Premier Local Food Networking Event.

Taste-real members include farms, restaurants, caterers, retailers, distributors and supporters (accommodation providers, breweries and transportation services). Membership in the program currently stands at over 120 businesses. Farms and producers that have the capacity to support wholesale and restaurant sales are identified on the Local Food Map, helping to emphasize the importance of connecting farmers to potential consumer channels. Fostering partnerships between businesses along the local food and drink supply chain is another mission of the taste-real program and successful partner stories are highlighted on the taste-real website.

The taste-real brand is designed to help visitors identify foods that have been grown in

Wellington County at retail outlets, restaurants, cafeterias and other locations where food is bought or served. Taste-real partners benefit from the brand's recognition and the extent to which food purchases are informed by consumers' preference for local food.

Kawartha Choice FarmFresh – Peterborough and the Kawarthas, Ontario

In Central Ontario, Kawartha Choice FarmFresh is a local agri and food program that promotes agricultural products grown in Kawartha Region. Led by a passionate group of farmers, producers, chefs and retailers, the program's purpose is to create a recognizable brand for consumers who are eager to support local farms and businesses.

Memberships are available for producers, farmers' markets, food services and agri-tainment operators – farmers who are offering an entertaining or educational farm experience. Membership benefits include promotional marketing materials, use of the Kawartha Choice FarmFresh logo, access to business development resources, industry workshops and networking events. Members of this local program must be located in the designated "Buy Local region", which includes the County and City of Peterborough and the City of Kawartha Lakes.

SAVOUR Muskoka – Muskoka and Parry Sound, Ontario

Created in 2004 by representatives from agricultural, hospitality, retail and micro-processing industries, this local food program aims to strengthen the local food system capacity and broaden the food tourism offerings in Muskoka and Parry Sound. SAVOUR Muskoka operates an outreach center and provides resources for members, in addition to running annual signature events, workshops and farmers' markets. In partnership with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and the District of Muskoka, SAVOUR Muskoka is working to develop a Food & Agriculture Charter for the region.

Membership is open to farmers, producers, farmers' markets, restaurants, retailers, accommodations and micro-processors. Approved members looking to integrate more local food and drink can receive assistance from SAVOUR Muskoka staff in doing so, as well as access to regional event involvement as part of SAVOUR Muskoka.

Taste of Nova Scotia – Nova Scotia, Canada

On Canada's East Coast, Taste of Nova Scotia is a province-wide food marketing association with nearly 150 participating members, including farmers, producers, restaurants, accommodations and retailers. Taste of Nova Scotia has been a leader and innovator in developing food tourism programs in Canada and abroad. The program's key mandate is to facilitate the growth of its member businesses and to promote the province's unique food and beverage products.

Taste of Nova Scotia hosts numerous events, food fairs, dinners and tastings across the province. In addition to producing an annual guide for all of its member businesses, members also receive a profile on the Taste of Nova Scotia website. These members have met the program's criteria and have demonstrated a commitment to maintaining standards of quality related to food, service and hospitality.

Dig In VT – Vermont, USA

In the United States, Vermont is recognized as a leader in food tourism. Dig In VT is a food tourism project created by Vermont's Agriculture and Culinary Tourism Council through a partnership between the Department of Agriculture and the Vermont Fresh Network. The overarching goal of Dig In VT is to support Vermont's food and farming sectors through the promotion of related tourism experiences. The Dig In VT website hosts event and business listings for five sub-regions in the state. There are currently 324 listings in the database.

Visitors to the website can search for particular products and experiences, including farm stands, restaurants, farmers' markets, accommodations, farm visits, culinary markets, workshops, farm stays and maple syrup producers. Event postings on the website span a range of themes, from farm tours to brewer's dinners. A number of different food-themed trails are also listed, including a beer and cheese pairing trail, a maple trail and a 'farm to (ski) slope' trail.

Gaining Ground (Grow Chattanooga) – Tennessee, USA

Launched in 2010, Gaining Ground is a local food program designed to strengthen and promote the local food movement in Chattanooga by supporting family farmers, farmers markets, restaurants, businesses, non-profits, entrepreneurs and policy makers in the region. This initiative receives funding from the Benwood Foundation, a charitable foundation in Chattanooga that provides grants for community development. Gaining Ground hosts a variety of food and drink events throughout the year, including farm-to-table dinners, gardening workshops and seasonal restaurant promotions. In 2012, the Gaining Ground initiative and Benwood Foundation welcomed renowned good food activist Michael Pollan to Chattanooga for a free public lecture at a local theatre.

Membership in this local food program is open to farms, food artisans and processors, farmers' markets, restaurants, grocers, community gardens and resource organizations. Once accepted as members, these businesses receive a listing in the Local Food Trade Directory, promotional and marketing materials and use of the "Harvested Here" label.

The New Hampshire Farm to Restaurant Connection – New Hampshire, USA

This certified local food program, spearheaded by the non-profit corporation New Hampshire Stories Inc., works to enhance the viability of New Hampshire's farms and maintain rural heritage through the promotion of agricultural products and consumer education. The program also provides guidelines for hosting sanctioned growers' dinners and lists members in a New Hampshire Dining and Product Resource Guide available on their website.

The NHFRC links New Hampshire farms and food businesses with New Hampshire restaurants. Interested restaurants must submit a Certified Local Program Application and describe their motivation for sourcing locally. Restaurants are evaluated using a point system that assesses quantity and regularity of use of New Hampshire products, including meat, produce, honey, dairy, fish and beverages. Approved restaurants

receive promotion and marketing materials, including a NHFRC logo to signify certification. There are currently ten certified restaurants.

Appalachian Grown – Southern Appalachian Mountains and NC, USA

A division of the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), a non-profit organization based out of Asheville, North Carolina, the Appalachian Grown program works to improve the connections to local food and certify local products that are grown and raised in the Southern Appalachians. In addition to the certification program, ASAP also provides marketing support and training to farms, produces a local food guide, organizes several farmers' markets and runs a farm-to-school program.

Appalachian Grown certification is free and available to farms, farmer groups and farmers' markets. Restaurants, distributors, retailers and processors may apply to become Appalachian Grown licensed partners.

Island Grown in the San Juans – San Juan County, Washington, USA

This local food program was established in 2007 to celebrate the bounty of San Juan County's rich agricultural heritage and inform locals, visitors and businesses about the benefits of supporting local farms. This membership-based organization also runs the Farmer-Fisher-Chef Connection networking initiative and hosts an annual Island Grown Festival, which features garden tours, cooking workshops, farm tours, harvest dinners and tastings spread throughout the San Juan Islands.

Membership is open to farmers, producers, restaurants and community supporters. Farmers and producers must specify primary crops and local restaurants/businesses that they supply to on their application, while restaurants and food businesses must estimate the percentage of locally produced ingredients used each season and describe their commitment to local sourcing.

Membership benefits may include regional and national promotion, promotional and marketing materials and a profile on the Island Grown website and/or Island Grown Food and Farm Map. There are currently 29 Island Grown members in San Juan County, the smallest of Washington's 39 counties with a population of 15,769 (*U.S. Census Bureau).*

Certified SC Grown – South Carolina, USA

This local food program has two components – Certified SC Grown and its complementary Fresh on the Menu, the restaurant-based second phase of the program launched in 2008. Led by the South Carolina Department of Agriculture, the program has also partnered with the South Carolina Arts Commission to create the innovative Arts and Agri-Culture program, which supports local artists who create artwork with local materials and/or depict South Carolina's agricultural heritage and traditions.

Certified SC Grown members include farmers, farmers' markets, restaurants, retailers, wholesalers, processors and artisanal producers. Participating businesses receive promotional and marketing materials, as well as retail and advertising support as part

of their free membership. There are currently over 1,400 Certified SC Grown members.

Scotland Food and Drink – Scotland

Although relatively new, Scotland Food and Drink has achieved much success since its inception in 2007. The World Food Travel Association has recognized Scotland as a leader in food tourism development. The mission of this not-for-profit trade association is to build Scotland's international reputation as the “land of food and drink' with support from the Scottish Government and grow the value of the industry from £10 billion to over £12.5 billion by 2017.

Scotland Food and Drink offers its members access to a log-in directory of industry resources, including financial planning, trade regulations, labeling guidelines, marketing and branding expertise, trend forecasting and identification of opportunities in international markets. The organization also hosts a number of industry-exclusive events aimed at helping businesses run more successfully. Members who have achieved success through the program are often profiled in a Case Studies section of the website and recipients of a Scotland Food & Drink Excellence Award. Through a partnership with the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, the Excellence Awards showcase the innovation, ingenuity and economic impact of the nation’s food and drink industry.

Hawkesbury Harvest – Australia

Located just outside of Sydney in New South Wales, Hawkesbury Harvest is a community-based organization and local food program that highlights the unique experiences available in the Hawkesbury region. Since its inception in 2004, this local food program has developed several products, including a farm gate trail, open farm days and farmers’ markets, as well as special events.

The program also provides industry development and regional branding to member businesses. Hawkesbury Harvest received a Greater Sydney Tourism award for their marketing initiatives in 2011.

Three levels of paid membership are available: Premium Farm Gate Trail (presence on physical guide and website), Basic Farm Gate Trail (website listing only) and Friends of Hawkesbury Harvest. Membership is open to farms, artisanal producers, restaurants, accommodations, trails, culinary schools and tours. Member businesses are subject to site inspection from the committee and must adhere to the Standards of Hawkesbury Harvest code, have public liability insurance and agree to attend a minimum of three networking events.

WHAT DO THESE BEST PRACTICES HAVE IN COMMON?

After studying the provincial and international best practices listed above, a number of trends and general themes emerge around these programs. Each program supports, includes and connects businesses from across the supply chain - farmers, farmers’ markets, producers, restaurants, retailers, accommodations and processors. This

holistic approach to a local agri and food program creates members who see the value in joining and consumers who make deeper, more direct connections to local food and the agricultural heritage of the region.

Components of Successful Local Agri and Food Programs:

1. A Membership Program, with set criteria
   → with few exceptions, this is generally a "pay to play" membership
2. A Logo, which identifies the region by name, as well as by associated imagery
3. A Local Food Brand that is used by industry members to publicize the use of local ingredients
4. An Education Program that provides valuable knowledge, resources and/or skill training to various member groups
5. Participant Networking Opportunities
6. Access to valuable Industry Resources and Opportunities
7. Consistent Monitoring by a Board of Directors or an appointed committee of engaged stakeholders

RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPANDING THE *SIMPLY LOCAL* PROGRAM

Designed to promote Halton's agricultural industry, the Halton Region *Simply Local* program is an example of an agritourism initiative. *Simply Local* is aimed at strengthening the connections between Halton residents and Halton farms and encouraging healthy eating and physical activity.

Currently, the program includes farms, farmers' markets, garden centres and nurseries, equestrian attractions and agricultural fairs. These businesses are represented on a map that includes contact information, available products and on-site activities for each location. The map is available in hard copy and on the Halton Region website.

Simply Local provides an excellent foundation from which to build a food tourism program and support further agritourism development. This could be done by:

1. Encouraging the development of new on-farm experiences.

   An engagement strategy and education program focused on providing farmers with information as to the benefits of agritourism, along with the tools and resources to support them in developing successful, market ready on-farm experiences for tourists (with or without a food component) would ultimately serve to add additional assets to the *Simply Local* map. See Chapter 9 for additional detail on these farmer education recommendations.

2. Incorporating "off-farm" channels, like restaurants, retailers, accommodations and attractions that showcase local food into the program.

   Broadening the scope of the *Simply Local* guide to include restaurants, retailers, accommodations and attractions will provide tangible evidence to locals and tourists that Halton Region is both an agri *and* a food tourism destination.

3. Increased Marketing & Promotion

   Enhanced branding, marketing and promotions collateral and activities may help to increase the awareness of the program outside regional boundaries and increase its appeal to both agri and food tourists.

Finally, by including market-ready businesses across the agri and food tourism value chain that are offering authentic regional tastes and experiences, an expanded *Simply Local* program would offer a readily available collection of businesses for outreach and involvement in product development and packaging initiatives, including Harvest Halton and the Pumpkin Trail (discussed in Chapters 8c and 8d).

This program and group of stakeholders would also help to encourage other businesses that do not meet the market ready and local food criteria to make enhancements to their business that would allow them to get involved. It is the recommendation of OCTA that the Region work with individual businesses by facilitating workshops, toolkits or a Local Food Summit (see Chapter 7 for more recommendations) to improve their market readiness and degree of local sourcing *from Halton* over the next year. This could take the form of a farmer-chef networking session that leads to a restaurant sourcing produce from a farmer in the area. The recommended educational workshops and programs outlined in Chapter 9 could assist in these efforts.

It is also the recommendation of OCTA that membership for off-farm channels (e.g. restaurants, retailers, accommodations, etc.) be dependent, at least in some part, on the off-farm business offering a defined amount of Halton-sourced products. With these criteria in place, the participation of off-farm businesses will ultimately lead to increased revenue for Halton's growers and producers.

For the reasons outlined above, an expanded agri and food tourism program in Halton would act as a cornerstone to on-going successful agritourism development in the region. Drawing on the successful commonalities between the best practice examples, the following section outlines important considerations for implementing a broader agri and food tourism program. These factors should be considered in the context of what makes sense for Halton Region. It is further recommended that changes and enhancements to the existing *Simply Local* program be done in collaboration with current *Simply Local* participants.

Steps to Developing a Local Agri and Food Program

Engage Members and Stakeholders

Engagement of members and stakeholders should take place throughout the life of a local food program. At the beginning, current *Simply Local* participants should be consulted regarding program changes. Additional education may be required to assist organizations in meeting the membership criteria (see Chapter 9).

Once a solid membership is in place, it is recommended that the program incorporate the following aspects to keep members engaged and continuously improving so that the program can be leveraged for new experience development that will continue to draw tourists:

: Encourage networking amongst producers
: Offer networking opportunities for members
: Explore horizontal partnerships with like-minded organizations
: Explore membership bonuses
: Deliver education and training
: Establish action committees for various streams of the program:

1) Food tourism experiences (e.g. attracting value-add businesses, cooking classes, tasting opportunities, restaurant programs)

2) Agritourism experiences (e.g. trail riding, equestrian experiences with local food and drink, pick-your-own farms, special seasonal events)

Set Development Goals & Objectives

A set of agreed upon goals and objectives are important to articulate why the Region is undertaking a local food initiative. These goals should be stated clearly in only a few words, be measurable, achievable and realistic, and include a time frame. Each year, the outcomes should be reviewed against the set goals and objectives.

Examples of goals and objectives could include:

- Increase visitor spend
- Increase number of visits to and time spent in the region
- Target for participating businesses in Year 1
- Increase revenue for farmers

Understand the Tourism Market

It is important that Halton Region understand the overall tourism market and specifically understand agri and food tourism, including knowledge of similar programs in the marketplace. The best practices described earlier in the chapter provide a good start for assessing competing experiences and understanding what is required for a successful program.

Successful marketing is a result of completely understanding your audience – who they are, where they live and the leisure needs they seek to satisfy. For the first year, consider the market that is currently attracted to Halton and the psychographics of agri and food tourists outlined in Chapters 4 and 5. General tourism demographics are also available in existing sources such as the *Halton Region Premier Ranked Tourist Destination 2007 Final Report* and the *Halton Region Annual Tourism Overview* (2013).

Financial Planning

Determining the financial resource requirements will allow for proper allocation of time. A financial plan considers the importance of each goal and prioritizes these goals to create an accurate critical path. This step is critical to the success and sustainability of an organization.

: Determine costs (e.g. promotional and marketing materials) and available funds
: Set budget

: Set membership fees (if applicable)
: Set fundraising goals and opportunities

Perform SWOT Analysis and Identify Market Ready Businesses

Understandably, not every farm business is suited for agri and food tourism. It is understood that a continuum of sorts exists in terms of businesses that are appropriate for participating in a food tourism program, and those that are not. Even within the group of businesses whose attributes fit within an agri and food tourism program, some businesses are better suited than others. When developing a strategy for a local agri and food program, an important initial step is identifying a region's strengths, as well as areas for future improvement, in terms of business, product and ultimately, experience offerings. This is the primary purpose of the Experience Assessment and SWOT analysis provided in Chapter 6 and Appendix F.

Of note, there are only a small number of tourism businesses that are currently sourcing their food and drink offerings from within Halton. Therefore, an important first step to an enhanced *Simply Local* program will be to offer farmers and businesses a chance to connect through workshops, resources and networking opportunities and encourage sourcing from Halton.

In 2005, the Economic Planning Group of Canada made recommendations for the food tourism industry in Nova Scotia. Their *Nova Scotia Culinary Tourism and Agri-Tourism Sector Study* proposed a hierarchy that allowed Nova Scotia's food tourism businesses and initiatives to be categorized into one of three tiers. The first tier represents businesses/initiatives that provide a basic product and service offering, such as those limited to on-farm stands and u-pick operations. Businesses/initiatives that fall into the second tier offer more extensive experiences, such as a farmers' market with a wider range of product offerings and tours of various operations. The third tier represents businesses and initiatives that offer the highest level of quality in the experience they provide. Demonstration workshops that incorporate interaction with the producer or farm-based bed and breakfasts where guests take part in daily chores are examples of businesses that fall into this category. While Tier 2 businesses must often be packaged together to create a signature experience, businesses in the third tier can stand alone as signature experiences.

In order to determine which category businesses fall into, the study proposed a set of market readiness criteria (see Appendix D for a complete breakdown of this criteria). These included “essential” attributes (e.g. safety and liability insurance requirements, providing an authentic, quality experience) and “preferred” attributes (experience is readily accessible and marketed to tourists). The study recommended that some percentage of these preferred attributes be required in order for businesses to be accredited and suggested that 50% of the preferred attributes should be met for the Tier 2 category and 75% for Tier 3 category.

Membership Criteria

Setting clear membership criteria is the primary mechanisms by which regions guarantee the standards of their local agri and food program are upheld. As such, criteria must be clearly defined with an approach for accreditation and monitoring in place. Being a service-oriented sector, it is imperative that regions looking to improve their agri and food tourism offerings set and maintain these standards so that their products consistently offer high levels of quality and value to visitors. Establishing

criteria also provides guidelines, suggestions and motivation for businesses looking to improve their market readiness.

The following list is a sample of criteria for participants in a local agri and food program:

All Members	must be accessible to tourists (i.e. welcoming and safe property, appropriate hours of operation, signage), and comply with all applicable regulations and liability insurance
Producers	must possess a certain number of purchasing agreements with local retail outlets or restaurants, and/or be accessible to tourists at farmers' markets or through farm gate sales
Processors	must source a certain percentage of ingredients from within a defined geographic area
Restaurants	must purchase a certain monetary amount of products from member producers and menus must showcase a certain number of locally-produced ingredients on a seasonal or year-round basis
Retailers	must offer a certain number of local products and identify the producers
Additional Requirements	a set level of participation in events and promotions, must display regional food brand and promotional materials, must ensure staff are knowledgeable about the program

Note: See Appendix E for membership criteria of the best practices listed previously. These examples employ a variety of models that could be adopted or modified for Halton Region.

The Experience Assessment completed in Chapter 6 incorporates many of these elements around market readiness and commitment to local sourcing that are typically incorporated into membership criteria. It is the recommendation of OCTA that participation on the *Simply Local* map be restricted to only those businesses that receive a "*champion"* or "*leader"* rating in the Experience Assessment Tool (EAT™) and are practicing Halton sourcing.

The exact criteria should be developed in consultation with current *Simply Local* participants and other key agri and food tourism stakeholders to ensure a balance between program integrity and realistic expectations for the region.

Membership Fees

Membership fees vary widely from region to region. In some cases, businesses must "pay to play" while in other instances, the program is funded by a grant or through the region. Membership fees help to cover the costs of on-going program development and promotional efforts. Within the "pay to play" model, there are several examples of fee structures. One fee may be applied to all members, or the fee may be dependent on the business type (e.g. farmer vs. restaurant) and business size (e.g. a 100-seat restaurant would pay more than a 10-seat restaurant).

Accreditation Process

Once membership is clearly defined, accreditation and/or certification can occur. Once a business passes predetermined standards (set through the membership criteria), they might become certified, receive an icon on the map and other promotional materials (e.g. use of the Halton Region or *Simply Local* logo to use in their communications). It is important to establish a committee that will inspect and monitor businesses for adherence to the membership criteria. This committee may be composed of stakeholders or a third party.

: Self-assessment
: Mystery shop or pre-arranged on-site inspection
: Certification
: Review and recommendations

Place Based Branding & Marketing

Agri and food tourism destinations must ensure that the experiences marketed to tourists are indeed authentic and aligned with the agricultural and culinary identity that is promoted by the region. Coherent messaging and branding is essential to developing a food tourism destination's identity and to distinguish its offerings from those in competing destinations.

As the Region better defines its positioning and branding, it is recommended that "Halton" should be incorporated into the program name as a way to identify the region to potential tourists while building off the existing, locally recognized *Simply Local* branding. Logos and on-site signage should also be considered as a way to identify program participants in both the on- and off-farm channels. Logos also help to promote the image of Halton.

Once an appropriate program name, logo and associated messaging exist, consideration will have to be given to how to promote the program.

Marketing initiatives most often include:

- Advertising and print materials
- Media releases
- Event and product promotion
- Creation of a dedicated website and promotion
- E-mail blasts
- Social media campaigns
- An interactive map and/or app

Best Practices - Branding and Marketing

The Appalachian Grown logo can be found on produce and packaging, as well as in-store display materials across Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Appalachian Grown is a certification program. This model was chosen as it allows for more control over the use of the logo and moves away from the word "local" to define more regional parameters.

Dig In Vermont, created by Vermont Fresh and the Vermont Agriculture Innovation Center worked with a design agency to launch their program in 2010 with an interactive website introducing tourists to Vermont's farmers, producers and chefs and focusing on food trails. Visitors to the Dig In site can create custom trails or choose a contributor's trail.

For the State of Vermont, a branding exercise was used to create a new brand in 2003. A survey of residents, visitors and purchasers of Vermont products was conducted to create a list of the key defining attributes of the state. Among these attributes, "beautiful" and "peaceful" were the strongest descriptions. Vermont's tourism board has created a strict set of guidelines to maintain the state's brand. Brand consultants have estimated that Vermont-branded products have a 10-15% premium in markets ("A little state with a big brand", 2010).

In Nova Scotia, Taste of Nova Scotia was created in 2009 when the Taste of Nova Scotia Society and the Taste of Nova Scotia Quality Food Program merged. A new brand was created to express the new vision of the organization along with the tagline "from our land, from our sea, from our hands". The program's design agency received a Summit Creative Award for excellence in brand design.

Pilot Testing of Various Program Streams

This could include the development of trails or routes (see Chapter 8d), event programming (see Chapter 8c) and/or the incorporation of additional establishments in phases (e.g. Certified SC Grown program).

Monitoring and Assessment of Program

: Are goals and objectives being met?
: What needs to be corrected/adjusted?
: What new goals and objectives are necessary?

Planning for the Future

: Follow future projections/trends in tourism (provincially, nationally and globally)
: Follow regional trends (e.g. population demographics, infrastructure, land usage)

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the model employed, businesses must be market ready in order to create and/or expand the *Simply Local* program. It is the recommendation of OCTA that building this inventory of market ready businesses be made the first priority to ensure there is a critical mass of businesses before launching any new initiatives.

A successful local agri and food program is more than just a map – it is a measurable tool to help local businesses see the value in creating authentic agri and food tourism experiences and to showcase the participating businesses that do this well. By establishing criteria for participation in the program and creating a membership

strategy, *Simply Local* has the potential to be a strong agri and food tourism piece for the region by connecting farmers to a larger audience and helping to strengthen the local food supply chain.

8C. DEVELOPING A SEASONAL PUMPKIN TRAIL

PRIORITY: 1

TIMING: 2013 – Develop Product and Launch
2014 – Review 2013 Model, Engage and Educate to Increase Participation, Revise Trail (where necessary)

ROLE OF REGION: Active Committee Member; Lead for Branding and Marketing; Lead for Finances

INTRODUCTION

Many local agri and food tourism destinations cluster together their unique assets and bundle them into trails, tours and/or routes. A trail can be an effective illustration of the depth of a local food product in a region and celebrate a number of food assets in a region. It can help provide that local area with credibility and exposure as a food destination. These initiatives are designed to drive traffic to a set of participating businesses that meet predetermined criteria and fit into a particular theme (other tourism trails and products are developed for arts/studio tours, bicycle/motorcycle tours etc.).

Many trails and tours have an annual event to celebrate their theme. These events provide an outlet for increased media attention, community engagement and potentially revenue generation.

Agri and food tourists are motivated to travel for a "taste of place" and to learn about how their food is produced through hands-on experiences. In order to establish Halton as an agri and food tourism destination, it is imperative that authentic and unique regional offerings are featured on the path/Trail and at the event. When developing the Pumpkin Trail* it is important to consider the expectations of the consumer and ensure that the participating businesses have the capacity to meet those expectations. It is also important to realize that visitors will rarely follow a food trail religiously. Rather it may be a motivator for them to visit an area or they will use it as a guide for things to do or visit or places to eat while they are engaged in other tourism activities and attractions.

Designed to celebrate the harvest and a specific commodity that is in abundance in the region, the Pumpkin Trail has the opportunity to create community ambassadors, as well as attract new and repeat visitors to the region. Festivals and events are key assets to attracting visitors to a destination – linking the Pumpkin Trail with an event such as Harvest Halton (Chapter 8d) can help leverage one asset to build content for the other. Both the Trail and the event will give Halton Region a compelling reason to enter the marketplace and begin to build relationships with agri and food tourists. It is important to celebrate these successes with the region's stakeholders and create a local following of proud community ambassadors.

** OCTA recommends using the word "Path" as it is less common than Route or Trail and uses memorable alliteration.*

This chapter provides directions and recommendations to develop the Trail and the Harvest Halton Event to strengthen Halton's agri and food tourism offerings.

Role of the Region

It is recommended that the Region be actively involved in the Trail development, either by leading or participating on the Pumpkin Trail Steering Committee, as well as assisting with branding and marketing resources and financial management. The Region should also look to provide support and identify opportunities to link the Trail and the Harvest Halton Event (see Chapter 8d)

TRAILS & ROUTES PROGRAMS

Trails and Route Programs vary greatly all over the world, celebrating a variety of themes with different revenue generating models and approaches. While each model has its advantages, it is important for Halton Region to engage its stakeholders and leverage the energy and momentum of this group to create a Trail that best represents the Region.

In order to make it sustainable, a food trail should always by developed and maintained with the input from trail participants. It is advisable to create a steering group that is representative of all participants to manage trail development and expectations on behalf of the group.

Consideration should also be given to creating a business plan for the trail to aid in long term planning, provide clear purpose for the group and ensure the Trail's financial sustainability.

Based on the work presently being done in the Region by the Pumpkin Trail Steering Committee, the following section has been developed to support the Committee based on the information provided to OCTA.

Best practices have been included below to begin the chapter. When developing new product and programs, it is important to have knowledge and understanding of similar programs that currently exist.

TRAIL & ROUTE BEST PRACTICES

** indicates a culinary tourism product that Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance team members have been involved with*

*Taste Trail – Prince Edward County, Ontario

Taking place across the entire County of Prince Edward, the Taste Trail was established in 2005 and incorporates 24 businesses that meet set criteria and pay an annual fee. The businesses must be open 8 months of the year or longer, post their hours of operation (and adhere to them), carry sufficient insurance, promote their unique taste offering to the consumer and pay an annual fee of $1200.

The Taste Trail program is delivered in both official Canadian languages. It has permanent route signage (through the Ministry of Transportation and Public Works), a website, an annual print guide, as well as a marketing and media relations program.

*Chocolate Trail / Bacon & Ale Trail / Maple Trail – Stratford, Ontario

These culinary tourism programs have been developed in the past four years with the Chocolate Trail starting in 2010, the Bacon & Ale Trail in spring of 2012 and the Maple Trail launching in the spring of 2013.

Each trail is complete with its own map and vouchers. Consumers purchase a trail passport that includes $25 in vouchers in person at the Tourism office or online. The vouchers are redeemed at up to 5 of the 10 to 15 locations (each trail varies with the number of participating businesses) for a unique taste. These unique tastes vary according to the trail's theme and location.

Business profiles for the Savour Stratford Maple Trail

The business operators do not pay to be on the trails (they must be paid members of the Stratford Tourism Alliance to participate) but rather must deliver a taste experience to the consumer. The business operators submit all redeemed vouchers to the Stratford Tourism Alliance monthly and are reimbursed for the hard cost to deliver their taste experience.

The Stratford Tourism Alliance prints the trails and vouchers and promotes the trails in their annual marketing programs including their website and media relations.

Wine Route – Ontario

The Wine Council of Ontario (WCO) delivers the Wine Route to its member wineries. The route crosses the province through key areas that WCO services including Lake Erie North Shore, Pelee Island, Twenty Valley, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Beamsville into Toronto and Prince Edward County.

In addition to promoting the Wine Route in their annual Wine Country Ontario Travel Guide, they have a mobile website and an integrated marketing and PR campaign. The Travel Guide also features supporting businesses along the route including accommodations and restaurants.

Butcher, Baker, Winemaker Trail - Australia

As a global leader in culinary tourism, numerous food and beverage trails have been established throughout Australia. For example, formal trails have been developed for each of the twelve regions of South Australia.

The Butcher, Baker Winemaker Trail (BBWT), established in 1985, was the first of its kind developed in South Australia. The BBWT connects local wineries, dining venues and businesses that rely on products made with traditional methods and ingredients. Visitors can find retailers and artisans in the Barossa Butcher, Baker, and Winemaker Guide and Trail Map or join various specialist tours. The Trail Map also highlights picnic destinations and scenic overlooks along the route. There are over 20 participants on the Trail.

The BBWT offers a voucher book to visitors for $65. The voucher book is available at Visitor Information Centers and valid for one year. With the voucher book, visitors receive a gift basket of souvenirs, local edibles and a free bottle of wine from a participating winery. A "Tour Genie" GPS unit is also available for $35.

Tourism Barossa manages the BBWT and membership within Tourism Barossa is scaled according to capacity (e.g. by # of bookable rooms for accommodations, licensed v. unlicensed for restaurants). There is no information available online of specific criteria to be on the BBWT (or if the criteria is separate from being a member of Tourism Barossa). There was mention of a Smart Card system for the Trail that was launched in 2008 but there is no reference to this in the new brochures. It may have proven too cost prohibitive for the smaller participating businesses (who had to purchase a specific Smart Card credit machine and pay for maintenance) and was disbanded.

My Gourmet Trail – Belgium

My Gourmet Trail in Brussels is one of the many trails can be found on the municipal website that directs visitors according to the purpose of their trip. A two-hour walk takes visitors past various cafés, confectioners, bakers, beer pubs and cheese shops.

One of the gastronomic capitals of Europe, Brussels boasts a Museum of Cocoa and Chocolate, a Belgium Brewers' Museum, the Schaerbeek Museum of Beer and the Brewers of the Grand Palace.

PEI Flavours Culinary Trail – Prince Edward Island, Canada

This trail is an initiative of the PEI Flavours brand and encompasses the five regions of Prince Edward Island. The PEI Flavours brand is connected to the Buy Local/Buy PEI Program and is led by the PEI Culinary Alliance. Participants on the trail include:

1) Culinary Adventures
2) Restaurants (with a commitment to local sourcing)
3) Local Markets (that sell local agricultural, fish and food artisan products)
4) Fishers
5) Authentic producers (who sell unique PEI food and/or beverage products)
6) Farmers (who sell agricultural products AND offer farm tours)

Promotional materials for this culinary trail include print and online guides and maps, as well as a mobile website. Participants are included in marketing activities (e-blasts and advertising) and promoted through social media channels.

PEI Flavours is sponsored by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, various ministry departments (Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development, Tourism & Culture, Agriculture & Forestry, Innovation and Advanced Learning) and industry partners.

Note: there are a number of seasonal pumpkin driving routes across the province that direct people to farms where they can pick they're own pumpkins. These routes do not include taste experiences, which will be a unique asset to Halton's Pumpkin Trail and offer added value to the visitor.

WHAT DO THESE BEST PRACTICES HAVE IN COMMON?

The best practices listed above have several common themes and trends, which contribute to their success. These trails celebrate the authentic assets and flavours of a region by sharing agricultural and food stories that align with the region's overall brand. These trails are successful at bringing together a group of like-minded businesses that might normally be competitors to work together around a common theme and showcase the region as a whole. Collectively, these businesses create a richer regional narrative and attract visitors, which in turn benefits everyone involved. This collaborative and holistic approach leads to future partnerships and a more robust agri and food tourism sector.

These trails are also creative and exciting, with inspired branding and marketing via attractive websites and materials. These materials work to entice tourists as well as stakeholders by promoting the value of partaking in the trail, which in turn attracts tourists, encourages visitors to linger longer and spend more money while in the region. These trails deliver on the consumer's expectation and therefore are also successful to the member businesses on the trail.

Components of Successful Agri and Food Tourism Trails:

1. Vision
2. Membership
3. Criteria
4. Logo/Brand (Identifies Businesses In Program)
5. Marketing Strategy
6. Public Relations Media Strategy
7. Monitoring and Development

Vision, Membership Criteria and Other Regulatory Measures

The Pumpkin Trail is an opportunity for the Region to reach out to stakeholders in the community with the message that agri and food tourism has been identified as a priority and economic opportunity for the Region.

Successful trails incorporate the entire tourism value chain, from accommodation properties to cooking schools to retailers and restaurants. When inviting these stakeholders to become members of the Pumpkin Trail and participate with a profile on the map, it is important to clearly outline the vision and goal of the program and define the criteria for participation.

There must be a critical mass of businesses for the Pumpkin Trail to be successful. These participating businesses must also be in close proximity. If businesses are too far apart from each other, the tourist will spend too long travelling between experiences.

In order to be successful, a food trail must deliver for both the visitor and the stakeholders. For the visitor, it must offer unique agri and food experiences that are enticing and distinctive enough to motivate them to travel. For the stakeholders, success could be measured by increased profit, foot traffic, and/or greater sustainability.

Setting Membership Criteria

Setting regulatory measures and clear criteria for participation and adhering to them are of critical importance to the success of a trail - the credibility of the businesses involved and the promise of a positive, worthwhile visitor experience will rely on them. The criteria will also form the basis for decisions around which businesses can participate. The criteria may be presented to interested businesses as a checklist to allow the businesses to decide for themselves if they should apply and how they fit the criteria. It is often beneficial to include creative examples outlining how a business can get involved with a program, either through unique product offerings or by partnering with like-minded businesses.

Specific examples for the Pumpkin Trail are outlined below.

It is recommended that two types of criteria be considered when developing the Trail:

1) Mandatory Criteria
- Compliance with this list of criteria is necessary for all participants and is crucial to the success of the Pumpkin Trail

2) Discretionary Categories
- Criteria which is more specific to each business type and/or Halton Region (e.g. *Simply Local* business partners)

The criteria to participate in the Trail are related to the expectations of the agri and food tourist. It is important to deliver on these expectations to create regional ambassadors and repeat visits. Word of mouth advertising through social media platforms can be beneficial, however it may do more harm than good if the experience does not deliver an authentic taste of a destination.

TRAIL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Pumpkin Trail Steering Committee should consider the following questions when creating the application:

- Where will businesses access information about participation on the Trail?
- How do businesses apply to be included on the Trail?
- How are these applications assessed for inclusion or exclusion?
- How often are new members accepted or recruited or non-conforming members removed? When will the second draft of the map be printed?
- How are the criteria and standards for participating members of the Trail maintained and regulated?

Potential partner businesses will want to know "What's in it for me?" or "WIIFM". Sample benefits of participating in the Trail may include:

- Opportunity to capture the attention of the fastest growing segment of tourism today – agri and food tourism; resulting in increased traffic and sales [insert estimated number of visitors over the month of October]
- Consumers are increasingly asking questions around where their food is coming from and how it is grown; by participating in this Regional program, your businesses will show its support of Halton farmers and the local food
- Opportunity to be featured in the Halton Pumpkin Trail marketing campaign including radio, print and online advertising, an extensive social media program and media familiarization tours
- Business Listing on the Pumpkin Trail Map [insert number of copies printed and distribution details] including:
    - Business Name and full contact information
    - Hours of Operation
    - Place-marker on the Map
    - 20 word Business Description
    - Photo
- Business Listing on the Pumpkin Trail Website [insert website address, and business listing details needed to create the website, website traffic]

Note: the Pumpkin Trail website should be viewed as a tool for the Region to give the businesses on the Trail added value with little associated cost and resources.

Trail Member Resources

Interested businesses should be given the tools and resources to successfully participate on the Trail. These resources may include:

- Database of Halton pumpkin farmers with full contact information
- Map of Halton Region boundaries
- Examples of products or experiences for each business category that could be featured on the trail
- Examples of partnership opportunities in the region to be featured on the Trail
- List of trail sponsors and if there are any resources provided by these sponsors for each location

Trail Membership Responsibilities

It is important that businesses are informed of their responsibilities as a Trail member prior to committing to participate. Businesses on the Trail should agree to adhere to the criteria and responsibilities by signing an agreement or pledge, which includes commitment to (but not limited to):

- Adhere to hours of operation outlined on the Trail
- Create the experience as advertised on the Trail
- Use and market local seasonal food – meet predetermined minimum requirements
- For farms – visible signage and promotion of the restaurants, accommodation providers and retailers they supply and in communication at farmers' markets and through farm gate sales
- For other businesses - promotion of local sourcing (e.g. farm supplier) on their menu or in their retail space, on their website and through communications by front of house and service staff and in their conversations
- Provide information on other Trail participants by including information on their website and at their location
- Educate staff to ensure they are knowledgeable and happy to engage customers around the regional food story and promote agritourism activities in the Region
- Clearly display any Trail promotional materials – both on-site and online
- Provide up-to-date information on the Pumpkin Trail website at all times
- Actively promote trail products to visitors
- Participate in joint promotional activities
- Participate in publicity, media events and familiarization trips as necessary
- Consider any other requirements specific to the Halton Region

Trail members should be encouraged to leverage the Pumpkin Trail traffic by engaging visitors while at their location through conversations, offering a promotion to visitors on the Trail, building relationships with those customers and educating them about the products and services offered at the location, both during the Trail and throughout the year. Successful visitor engagement will result in increase visitor spend and time both at the location and in the Region.

Sample: Halton Pumpkin Trail Commitment for Application Form

I understand that the Halton Pumpkin Trail is a month long culinary experience in the Halton Region during October 2013. By participating in the trial and signing below, I commit to offering the product outlined on the Trail while my business is open to the public during the month of October. I agree to contact the Halton Region at [insert contact information for the Region] immediately if I am unable to uphold my commitment.

Name:

Signature: *Date:*

Logo/Brand, Marketing and Media Strategy

A comprehensive marketing plan is vital to the success of a newly established food trail. It is recommended that the Region take responsibility for managing the branding and marketing of the agri and food tourism products in the region. This will allow for consistent messaging relating to the Region's target audience. Is it recommended that the Pumpkin Trail be branded as a "Halton Region" event.

The Pumpkin Trail brand should be simple and cohesive for the visitor. It is important that the Trail program be linked to other tourism offerings in the Halton Region during the remaining three seasons, so as not to pigeonhole Halton as a fall-only destination. Opportunities for programs and promotions across all four seasons are highlighted in Chapters 8e) Picnic Program Product Development & Marketing Campaign and 8f) Four-Season Destination Product Development & Marketing Campaign.

Consider the following questions when creating the regional brand:

- What can Halton Region offer visitors that no one else can?
- Develop branding – what is the look and feel of the Trail identity?
- Use clear and consistent symbols and colours to identify the various types of businesses
- Keep branding consistent across all marketing platforms
- Do you have an effective slogan or phrase that encapsulates the Trail and its location? For example, "Savour the Flavours of..." or "Taste of...".
- What type of communication pieces will the Region use? Examples include printed route maps, downloadable PDFs, apps, downloadable blogs and podcasts.
- Create Point of Sale materials for each participating businesses
- Who will create these materials?
- How will these materials be distributed?
- Does the Region have a media list?
- Who will create and implement marketing plan?
- What will the Trail's web presence be like?
- How will it be created and content managed? Where will it be hosted?
- What level of detail will be included about each Trail member balanced with the space for maps and imagery?
- Does the Region have high quality photographs, video and audio clips available?

- Will the Trail be signposted? If yes, how?
- How will the Trail be funded and maintained?

Remember - imagery is hugely important when promoting a food trail. Visitors relate well to photos that place the food in the context of the landscape and imagery that includes people they can relate to. Consumers want to learn about the people who are producing their food. When developing the Trail, create celebrities out of the farmers and chefs in the region. Feature their photo on the website and/or on the map with the products they are featuring. Incorporating fall colours into the marketing materials will reinforce that the Trail is a celebration of the harvest season.

Once approved, participating businesses receive the following materials:

- JPG Pumpkin Trail logo to post on their menus, print materials and online
- Hyperlink to the online version of the map (encourage businesses to link to this map through their own site)
- Printed window decal
- Copies of the map to display in their location
- Brief fact sheet to educate their staff about the Trail (e.g. summary about the program, timing, outlining any costs associated for consumer, etc.)

Once the Trail and supporting marketing materials are in place, an official launch event should be planned to celebrate with the Trail members, stakeholders, dignitaries, media and of course, the consumers. The event should be held at one of the stops along the Trail and showcase the wealth of tastes and experiences available at the participating businesses.

Note: With the Harvest Halton Event scheduled for the same time as the Pumpkin Trail, this could be a venue to launch the trail.

There are several creative ways to engage the media. Consider dropping off a basket with Trail product samples, an invitation to the launch event and marketing materials to members of the media, including radio station and television hosts. These “media drops” are an excellent way to attract attention - especially when they include food. Encouraging participating businesses to donate one item with a minimum value to participate for promotion or for marketing of the Trail is a good way for businesses to add value to the program with little cost to them.

Photo opportunities for media should also be available during the launch.

A social media engagement strategy should also be developed. This could include the creation of a Halton Pumpkin Trail Twitter account, a Facebook page, Instagram and Pinterest accounts, a Pumpkin Trail “Tweet Up” and a photo contest encouraging visitors to share their Trail experiences. This type of visitor engagement is also a quick way to create content for the Pumpkin Trail website and other marketing materials.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

It is important to measure the success of the Trail, which can prove the increase in business as a result of inclusion on the Trail. Tracking an increase in revenue and visitors can also support the case for membership fees as this data will illustrate the

value of participating to businesses. These membership fees can then be directed to future marketing and development initiatives.

It is recommended that the Region make it easy for participating businesses to track the requested information with a clear deadline of when this data is due. In most cases, businesses will request that the information be kept confidential and information released only as part of an average for all participating Trail members. It is the Region's responsibility to follow up with each participating member regarding the results of the program and gather their feedback in order to move onto the second year of the program.

Some performance measure examples include:

- Media mentions (about the businesses on the Trail or the Trail itself)
  Leverage and celebrate these mentions through social media and by sharing the link through e-mail to the stakeholders
- Increase in the numbers of visitors
- Increase in visitor spend
- Additional revenues generation
- Increased brand awareness

It is also recommended that the Region create a clear and concise method to collect consumers' data in order to follow up and gain feedback about the overall visitor experience. It is important to ensure that the method of collection is as simple as possible for both the consumer and the participating business.

This information could be collected through a contest, a random draw, an on-site survey at each location or through a stamp program. For the stamp program, visitors could receive a stamp at each stop they visit on the Trail and be entered to win a weekly prize once they have collected a minimum number of stamps (predetermined by the businesses). The prizes could be baskets featuring donated products from a different Trail member each week. This is a great way for the Region to gather emails and build a database of engaged agri and food tourists for future events in the region.

A follow up survey issued to consumers could be employed to collect visitor demographic information, overall satisfaction with the experience and suggestions for areas of improvement. Asking how visitors heard about the Trail and whether they participated in other activities while in the area is a useful way of looking at agri and food tourist patterns and trends.

STEPS TO DEVELOPING THE PUMPKIN TRAIL PROGRAM

1. Financial Planning
2. Set Development Goals & Objectives
3. Understand the Tourism Market
4. Engage Members and Stakeholders
5. Define Criteria to Participate
6. Determine Unique Offerings (from each stakeholder)
7. Develop Trail Marketing Assets (brand, web, print, signage)
8. Pilot (soft launch with a period to test the experience at each location)
9. Deliver Media/PR Program

10. Official Launch Event (celebrating the dedication and work of Trail members and stakeholders with media and consumers present)
11. Monitor and Assessment of Program
12. Plans for Future Development

WHAT COULD THE PUMPKIN TRAIL IN HALTON LOOK LIKE?

The Halton Pumpkin Trail is designed to showcase pumpkins along the agri and food tourism value chain – in farmers' pumpkin patches, on local restaurant menus, through themed cooking classes, in retail shops and at Halton's numerous attractions.

Potential Pumpkin Trail Experiences

Pumpkin cupcakes, butter tarts and pies at local bakeries
Pumpkin pie or bread making classes in a heritage museum kitchen
Cask night at a local brewery featuring a limited edition pumpkin beer
Pumpkin carving/painting kits at local retailers
Pumpkin Pie Kits (with pie plate, pumpkin and recipe) at specialty shops
Pumpkin seed saving workshops and gardening classes
Pumpkin-themed trail rides and campfire cookouts
(complete with pumpkin s'mores) at equine attractions
Pumpkin carving exhibition and/or competition featuring local talent
Pumpkin seed brittle and chocolate at local chocolatiers

In order to create a truly distinct and dynamic Trail, the Pumpkin Trail Steering Committee should encourage businesses in the region to be creative and think outside the box on how they can feature local Halton pumpkins. The Committee should contact potential participants directly with a list of growers provided by the Region and ideas around how to participate.

As a Committee member, the Region should work to encourage partnerships by outlining examples on how businesses can work together to showcase a taste of Halton. This will allow businesses that do not traditionally host visitors at their location the opportunity to be featured on the Trail and receive the marketing value from being included in the product. For example, a local brewery that does not offer tours could instead partner with a local restaurant to offer an autumn beer tasting flight featuring a locally sourced pumpkin beer. These partnerships will help to strengthen Halton's regional food and agricultural story and can be extended outside of the fall season.

HOW COULD HARVEST HALTON SUPPORT THE PUMPKIN TRAIL?

It is recommended that the Harvest Halton Event on October 5 or 6, 2013 at Country Heritage Park support the Pumpkin Trail in several ways. The Taste Event would be listed as an event on the Trail, leveraging the marketing material to promote the event and increasing the level of pumpkin-themed programming during the month.

There is an opportunity for pumpkins to be highlighted at the Harvest Halton Event by offering fringe family-oriented programming at Country Heritage Park, such as a pumpkin toss, pumpkin bowling and/or pumpkin carving/painting. Harvest Halton could also feature pumpkins for the event decor, by using baby gourds as candleholders for tables or pumpkins with fall flowers as centerpieces throughout the park.

A “Party in the Patch” event could be used for the official launch of the Trail. There is a pumpkin patch at Country Heritage Park and the park has expressed a willingness to plant pumpkins in the area for the Harvest Halton Event. In order to ensure the timely arrival of these pumpkins in early October, it is recommended that the Pumpkin Trail Steering Committee formalize the venue for their official launch event.

CONCLUSION

A Pumpkin Trail in Halton Region will be an effective and engaging way to celebrate the harvest season, bring focus to the region’s many pumpkin growers and showcase Halton as a delicious food destination. The Trail will also be an opportunity to bring agri and food tourism to the attention of locals and tourists alike, encourage stakeholders to work together, create partnerships between local businesses and generate support across the region for this exciting new program.

8D. HARVEST HALTON EVENT

PRIORITY: 1

TIMING: 2013 – Develop Product and Execute
2014 – Review 2013 Model, Educate and Engage to Increase Visitors and Community Engagement

ROLE OF REGION: Lead

INTRODUCTION

Creating an event that is authentic and celebrates the region's agricultural roots and culinary celebrities is an ideal way to put a destination on Ontario's food map. Harvest Halton is proposed as a one-day signature culinary event in early October featuring local chefs and farmers at Country Heritage Park. The goals of the event are to celebrate the harvest season, highlight the food culture in the region, create local ambassadors and create buzz in the media and food community to attract visitors to the Region. This event would have a connection to the Pumpkin Trail (Chapter 8c).

It is recommended that Halton Region take a leadership role in establishing and executing this event. An engaged and enthusiastic group of stakeholders already exist and have formed an organizing committee for the Harvest Halton event. The stakeholder group met in late May 2013 to decide on the event format. This chapter of the report is intended to provided the organizing committee with event planning and organization guidelines to ensure successful execution in Year 1 and to lay a solid foundation that will allow for the event to grow and continue to contribute to the region's food culture in the future.

The Ontario food event marketplace is heavily saturated, making it extremely important to be creative and stand out from other events in the province. Below is a list of agri and food events that are specific to pumpkins and the harvest season, as well as a list of one-day food Tasting events. It is recommended to become familiar with similar products in the marketplace and learn from best practices to find a model that best celebrates Halton Region. OCTA has identified both pumpkin and Tasting events, with the hopes of inspiring the creation of a uniquely Halton event (or the ability to grow the Harvest Halton event in future), which may tie together the Pumpkin Trail and reach the goals of the Harvest Halton event at Country Heritage Park.

AGRI & FOOD TOURISM THEMED EVENTS (PUMPKIN & HARVEST SPECIFIC)

** Indicates a culinary tourism product that Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance team members have been involved with.*

BEST PRACTICE: Port Elgin Pumpkinfest (Sept. 29-30, 2012)

Developed by the Town of Port Elgin BIA in 1986, Port Elgin Pumpkinfest was created to extend the tourism season in the region and has proven to be a massive success. Pumpkinfest attracts over 60,000 visitors each year and regularly wins provincial awards for its' programming, including the People's Choice Award from *Festivals &*

Events Ontario in 1998. In 2011, Pumpkinfest was a finalist for Event of the Year at the Ontario Tourism Awards. Event attractions include an agricultural tent, a classic car show, demonstrations and displays from master pumpkin carvers, an entertainment stage, a pet show, a seed spitting competition and a weigh-off competition that is recognized by the Giant Pumpkin Commonwealth (GPC).

*Upper Canada Village: Food Lover's Field Day (August 17-18, 2013)

Hosted by Upper Canada Village, Food Lover's

Field Day fills the Village fairgrounds with local food and beverage producers, giving visitors the chance to have a "field day" sampling and shopping the bounty of the region.

Outside of the fairgrounds, Upper Canada Village's staff dress is period costume to create a living history - presenting the region's original 100-mile diet through heirloom garden tours, heritage cooking demonstrations and taste testing at some of the various homesteads located on the historic site.

Note: This Festival has been included because the grounds are very similar to Country Heritage Park and as the Harvest Halton Event grows and diversifies it's programming to attract more guests, this festival may be used as a best practice.

Waterford Pumpkin Festival (Oct 18-20, 2013)

The Waterford Pumpkin Festival, now in its 31st year, takes place over three days each October and is organized by the Waterford Lions and Lioness Clubs. Homes and businesses in the downtown area decorate their spaces to compete in the Pumpkinfest House Decorating Contest and various dinners are held over the weekend at churches and halls. The festival features over 1,500 carved, lit pumpkins, as well as a pumpkin pyramid, a car show, a soapbox derby and a parade.

Prince Edward County Pumpkinfest (Oct 13th, 2012)

This event is run by the Prince Edward County Pumpkin Growers (PECPG) and was established in 1997 after a group of local growers got together to share giant pumpkin seeds and hold a weigh-off competition. The PECPG now use their giant pumpkin seeds as an annual fundraiser for the festival through a seed sale. PEC Pumpkinfest has expanded over the years to include a giant pumpkin parade, food vendors and entertainment. Giant Vegetable Growers of Ontario (GVGO) and local businesses sponsor this event.

The Keene Pumpkin Festival (Oct 19-20, 2012)

Just outside of Peterborough, the Keene Pumpkin Festival features a petting zoo, corn maze, children's entertainment, ghost walks, a farmers' market and a classic car show. This event has been recognized for their community involvement by *Festivals & Events Ontario* and received an Award of Recognition from the County of Peterborough for Tourism Promotion. Attendance at the 2011 event was 1,000 people.

BEST PRACTICE: Pumpkinferno (Oct 5-Nov 2, 2012)

Held over the month of October at historic Upper Canada Village, this festival features a night-time outdoor exhibit with thousands of glowing, hand-carved pumpkins just inside the Village gates. Launched in 2012, this event was the recipient of the *Festivals & Events Ontario* award for Best New Event in the province in 2012. The Ontario Government and the Great Waterway Regional Tourism Organization (RTO9) are sponsors of this event, which attracted 35,000 visitors in its first year. Led by the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, investment in the project has been estimated at $600,000 over three years.

OUTSIDE ONTARIO

BEST PRACTICE: Keene Pumpkin Festival (Oct 19th, 2013)

The Keene Pumpkin Festival is a single day event held in downtown Keene, New Hampshire every October that is designed to celebrate the season and the local artisans in the Monadnock region. Starting in 2011, the Keene Pumpkin Festival has been organized by Let It Shine Inc., a non-profit organization that was formed specifically to host this event. The packed programming schedule includes a one-mile pumpkin race, a costume parade, pumpkin bowling, a food court and a pumpkin tower. The festival has held the Guinness World Record for largest number of lit jack-o-lanterns in one place for several years, starting in 2003. Estimated attendance at the event in 2009 was 70,000 people (the population of Keene is 23,000 people).

BEST PRACTICE: Goomeri Pumpkin Festival (May 26th, 2013)

Held in Queensland, Australia, the Goomeri Pumpkin Festival regularly attracts upwards of 14,000 visitors each year for its pumpkin programming. The highlight of the festival is the Great Australian Pumpkin Roll™ that sees visitors rolling pumpkins down a hill towards the town's police station. Other events include a street market, pumpkin bowling, pumpkin shot put, a street parade and a heritage dinner dance. The festival was voted #24 on the list of RACQ's (the Australian version of CAA) Must Do's in Queensland.

BEST PRACTICE: Annapolis Valley Pumpkin Festival (month of October)

This Nova Scotia festival integrates many different businesses along the tourism value chain, including farm markets, u-picks, wineries, restaurants, art galleries and accommodations to celebrate the harvest season. Signature events and activities in the region during the month of October include the Kentville Harvest Festival, Oktoberfest, the annual Windsor-West Hants Pumpkin Weigh-Off, the Valley Harvest Marathon, a fall wine festival and an annual pumpkin regatta.

There is also a geo-caching scavenger hunt themed around pumpkins. Participants search for 4 of 8 "golden pumpkins" hidden around the valley and prizes include accommodation packages, private winery tours and certificates to local businesses.

BEST PRACTICE: Half Moon Bay Art & Pumpkin Festival (Oct 19-20, 2013)

Celebrating its 44th year in 2013, this festival was created to revitalize the downtown area of the rural community of Half Moon Bay, California. Programming includes a pumpkin parade (grand marshalled by former '49er quarterback Steve Young in 2012),

a Smashing Pumpkins: Battle of the Bands competition, street food vendors, local wineries and breweries, a haunted house, pie-eating contests, pumpkin carving, amusement park rides and an organic products showcase.

The event regularly attracts over 300,000 visitors, who can use the free mobile app and Wi-Fi provided by the event organizers, the Half Moon Bay Beautification Committee. It is estimated that the event raises over $500,000 through food, beverage, game and parking sales during the weekend.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SINGLE DAY FOOD FESTIVALS & EVENTS

** Indicates a culinary tourism product that Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance team members have been involved with.*

Guelph Wellington Local Food Fest (June 23rd, 2013)

Organized to celebrate local food and agriculture in the region, the Local Food Fest provides local growers, distributors, retailers, artists and artisans with the opportunity to share their skills and talents with the broader community and educate visitors on accessing, growing and preparing seasonal healthy food.

Now in its 8th year, this afternoon event at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre annually attracts over 2,000 visitors from the surrounding urban and rural areas of Guelph and Wellington County. There are 50 vendors selling produce, flowers and craft beer, as well as musical performances, cooking demonstrations and hands-on workshops. The event run by volunteers and presented by taste real Guelph Wellington, in collaboration with the Guelph Wellington Food Round Table (GWFRT).

*Taste - Community Grown (Sept. 28th, 2013)

In Prince Edward County, Taste – Community Grown, now in its 11th year attracts 2,500 people over for the afternoon (11 am to 5 pm) sampling and tasting event in September. Taste has now expanded into a weekend festival with additional programming.

TASTE
community grown

Admission to Taste is approximately $15-20 a person, sampling tickets are extra ($1 each) and vendors charge 2-5 sampling tickets per “taste”.

*Savour Stratford Perth County – Sunday Tasting (Sept. 22, 2013)

The Savour Stratford Sunday Tasting is one of the events within the weekend Culinary Festival in Stratford. The overall weekend Festival attracts 30,000 people to Stratford. The Tasting event runs from 12 pm to 4 pm and sells out with general admission tickets costing $75 and $125 VIP tickets. The Tasting is the weekend’s signature event, featuring at least 30 farmer-chef partnerships with sampling of VQA wine, craft beer and local Ontario cider. Awards are given out to the teams in six categories.

Fernwood Bites (June 23rd, 2013)

In Victoria, BC, Fernwood Bites is an annual food and drink event organized by the

non-profit organization Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group Society (Fernwood NRG).

The event is a fundraiser for Fernwood NRG and featuring local restaurants, beer and wine, live music and a silent auction. Held in Fernwood Square, attendance is capped at 300 attendees, with the desire to create an intimate event that allows vendors and guests to make meaningful connections. Tickets are $50 per person and the event regularly sells out.

Foire Gourmande Outaouais-Est Ontarien: *Taste the Shores of the Ottawa River* (Aug. 26th, 2012)

This one day event offers visitors the chance to sample tastes prepared with regional products from both sides of the Ottawa River, attend cooking demonstrations led by acclaimed regional chefs and browse vendors' products and wares at a public market. In 2013, the popular event will be expanding to three days to include a dinner & show event on the first night and a day of family programming.

The event is held at two sites, one on either side of the Ottawa River and shuttles/ferries run along the river to take guests between the locations. A local historian is also available on specific shuttles to share historical anecdotes of the region. In 2011, the event attracted over 7,500 attendees.

Recognizing the role of the event in increasing tourism for the agri-food sector, Foire Gourmande receives significant support from RDÉE Ontario (the Economic Development and Employability Network of Ontario). In 2012, the event received a $25,000 Economic Development Initiative grant from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

PEI Fall Flavours (Sept 7-29, 2013)

Picnic in the Park (at PEI Fall Flavours)

Part of the PEI Fall Flavours festival, this popular event is already sold out for 2013. Picnic in the Park takes place at Cavendish Park between 11AM – 2PM and offers guest a culinary picnic experience with a celebrity guest (in the past, Lynn Crawford, Anna Olson and Corbin Tomaszeski have all appeared).

Event organizers supply picnic baskets, tables and blankets and guests are treated to a picnic spread prepared by regional chefs and professionals from the Culinary Institute of Canada. Entertainment and chef demonstrations are ongoing during the event. Tickets are $40 for adults and $25 for children between the ages of 6 and 12.

Beef n' Blues (at PEI Fall Flavours)

Sponsored by Food Network and Atlantic Beef Products, this evening event offers guests the chance to taste Atlantic Signature Beef culinary creations from a celebrity chef (Mark McEwan is slated to host in 2013) and regional chefs. These dishes are designed to showcase local beef and also reflect fall colours and flavours. Blues music

is provided as live entertainment and tickets are $50 per person.

Other events held during the Fall Flavours Festival: **Applelicious: Meal in the Field** (a four course seated dinner with a cider and cheese reception), **Mussel Muncheon**, **Lobster Party on the Beach** and **Chef on Board** (a dinner cruise along the Northumberland Strait).

North Island's Gourmet Picnic (Sept. 15th, 2013)

Designed to support Vancouver Island's culinary culture, this sold out afternoon event offers guests the chance to interact with chefs, local wineries, breweries and producers($45 adult/$10 youth). In 2012, over 60 exhibitors were on hand to sample regional tastes. The event is sponsored by Coastal Black Estate Winery & Meadery with support of the North Island Chefs' Association and the North Island College Foundation. The picnic takes place on a working farm and is a fundraiser for NC Culinary Arts students. 800 tickets are sold for this event.

Sheridans Irish Food Festival (May 26th, 2013)

Now in its fourth year, this annual one day event features Ireland's top food producers, workshops and cooking demonstrations with local chefs, guided foraging trips, children's entertainment and live entertainment. Admission to the event is £5 and includes free admission to workshops (run through online registration). Visitors are encouraged to sample and purchase Irish products from the over 50 vendors in attendance. In 2013, the theme for the festival was Brown Bread and included workshops with flour and buttermilk producers and a Brown Bread making competition.

The Age Harvest Picnic at Hanging Rock (Feb. 24th, 2013)

Spearheaded by the not-for-profit organization Harvest Picnic Foundation, this event in Victoria, Australia is one of the longest running food and wine celebrations in the state. This day-long event features over 100 exhibitors, cooking demonstrations with Australian chefs, live entertainment and the "world's largest picnic rug" – a blanket created by local artisans that visitors can enjoy their lunch on. Each year the event draws upwards of 10,000 visitors.

Partners include The Age (an Australian newspaper) and Tourism Victoria. Visitors can vote on their favourite exhibitors and awards are handed out at the conclusion of the event.

Advance tickets are $25 and $30 at the door and include access to the reserve, cooking demonstrations, entertainment, activities and a program. Concession tickets are $20 and $25 at the door. A limited number of VIP tickets are also available for $90.

COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL LOCAL FOOD TOURISM EVENT

The events listed in the best practices section share a common theme of celebrating their unique regional story with strong community support. Successful events engage the community to build local champions and regional support, have strong leadership and good event management. A core element of good event management is a

properly prepared and implemented Business Plan. Successful events have the following components and associated steps:

1. Financial Planning – Realistic Budget
2. Set Event Goals & Objectives – Strategic Business Plan
3. Understand the Tourism Market
4. Engage Members and Stakeholders Throughout Planning Process
   : *See the five actions to creating a community supported event*
5. Create a Volunteer Working Committee with Defined Roles
6. Define Criteria for Event Participation
7. Licenses, Permissions and Insurance
8. Create a Unique Event Program
   : *What makes Harvest Halton stand out in the marketplace?*
   : *Entertainment and additional programming*
   : *Engage the community to create "fringe" events*
9. Event Sponsorship
10. Event Production Schedule - Organized Logistics and Operations
11. Develop Event Marketing Materials (brand, web, print, signage)
12. Deliver Media and Public Relations Program
13. Launch Ticket Sales
14. Volunteer Recruitment
15. On-Site Signage
16. Risk Management Policies - Health and Safety
17. Pre-event Media Launch
18. Event Evaluation
    : *On-site consumer survey and follow up survey to both ticket holders and participating businesses*
19. Plan for the Future

LEGAL ISSUES

It is OCTA's recommendation that Halton Region assume legal responsibility for the Harvest Halton event. This would allow the Region to apply for government grants in the future (e.g. Celebrate Ontario or the Canadian Heritage Grant). If the Region does not own the event, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be created between the organizers. It is important that the event operates under the umbrella of a legal entity to protect the volunteer organizing committee.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STEPS	ACTION
Inform and Engage	Communicate with the community about what is planned, the goals and vision of the event.
Consult	Offer a number of event development options / models and listen to feedback.
Decide Together	Consensual decision making
Act Together	Form partnerships and committees to implement the event action plan with committed stakeholders.
The Event	Committee facilitates and community supports event.

THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

A short section in the Business Plan should focus on the organizational structure of the team, defining the roles and responsibilities of any sub-committees and members. The section should also outline the guiding policies of the event and procedures for committee meetings.

Recommended Structure for the Executive Committee:

- Committee Chair / Event Coordinator from the Region
- Vice Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer (may be added to Chair's role)
- Communication Marketing and Public Relations
- Operations and Logistics
- Fundraising and Sponsorship
- Programming:
    - Farmer Representative
    - Restaurant Representative

Sub-Committees

Not all committees will need sub-committees, however as the event grows it may develop sub-committees to be more effective. Therefore, the committee structure should be defined in advance.

It is important that the Chair of the Executive Committee delegates responsibility to the Sub-Committee Lead in regard to budget by that sub-committee. The role of the sub-committees is to take total responsibility for all aspects of the event coming within their area of activity. The Lead/Chair of each sub-committee reports in detail at each Executive Committee meeting and regularly communicates to the Event Chair.

STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN

The Strategic Business Plan for an event acts as a road map to move the event from its current stage to the desired development for the future. Sponsors and granting agencies may seek a copy of the Business Plan in order to financially support the event.

The Business Plan should be prepared and completed by the Committee under the guidance of the Chair. While there are many variations on formatting, the Business Plan should give a summary of the committee and the event, an analysis of the demographic the event attracts or aims to attract, and financial and promotional strategies.

Recommended Structure for the Business Plan:

1. Committee Overview (with Legal Status)
2. Brief History of the Event
3. Vision

4. Mission Statement
5. Goals, Objectives and Strategies
6. Market Analysis
7. SWOT / Situation Analysis
8. Overview of the Event Program
9. Operational Plans
10. Critical Path
11. Risk Management
12. Event Evaluation and Feedback

DEVELOPING EVENT VISION AND MISSION, OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

Prior to this report, Harvest Halton's Volunteer Organizing Committee discussed the vision, mission and goals for the event in May, 2013. These ideas were captured in the meeting minutes. It is recommended that this be used as the framework to build these official statements and that they be clearly communicated to the community.

The Vision Statement

A vision statement is brief, precise and motivational in nature. It describes what the event seeks to become and what it seeks to achieve in the long term.

The Mission Statement

Why is the event being organized? The Mission Statement should indicate what the event is trying to achieve and to whom it is targeted. The following questions should be answered in the Mission Statement, which should be about two sentences long:

1. Who are the visitors?
2. What are their entertainment needs?
3. What are the core activities of the committee and why are these activities important?
4. How will the event promote Halton Region?

Goals and Objectives

A set of agreed upon goals and objectives are important to define why the Region is planning the event. The goals should be stated clearly in only a few words, be measurable, achievable and realistic and include a time frame to be achieved. Following the event the outcome should be reviewed against the set goals and objectives.

Event Strategy

Once the goals, vision and mission are set, the committee develops the strategy to reach these goals through the creation of the Critical Path, which is a living document that is normally shared and updated by the committee.

Market Analysis

It is very important that the committee understands their market, agri and food tourism and similar events in the marketplace, not only in the region but the provincial, national and international best practices as well. For future analysis of the event, the committee must collect information on the types of visitors that attend the event.

Successful marketing is a result of completely understanding your audience – who they are, where they live and the leisure needs they seek to satisfy. The post event evaluation techniques suggested later in this chapter will provide solutions on how to undertake market research. For the first year, consider the market that is currently attracted to Halton and the psychographic of the agri and food tourist outlined earlier in this report.

Situational Analysis

This involves analyzing the event in an honest and critical manner by looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) as they relate to the event. Strengths and weaknesses usually apply to the internal management or production of the event. Opportunities and threats refer to external issues not normally within direct control.

HARVEST HALTON EVENT PROGRAM

Halton Region has a very strong and engaged organizing committee made up of a variety of stakeholders from the region. As discussed earlier, the Committee met and agreed to the event's vision, mission and goals. The core element of the event was determined to be a tasting event, held at Country Heritage Park in Milton on either Saturday October 4th or Sunday October 5th, 2013. It was agreed that the ticket price would be accessible with low cost admission and "pay to play" sampling tickets available. The tasting event would showcase a variety of restaurants with stations and highlight local farmers, paired with Ontario VQA wine and local craft beer and cider.

The core tasting element of the event forms the main attractions for visitors. Agreement from the Committee on core themes is important from a marketing perspective and also helps to keep a clear Committee focus on the audience/market for the event.

The sprawling natural, outdoor setting of Country Heritage Park is an attractive location to host this afternoon or early evening autumn event. Harvest Halton will offer visitors the opportunity to enjoy tastes from a critical mass of well known, liked and respected independent restaurants from the region (at least 20-30 restaurants serving local food).

It is the recommendation of OCTA that the uniqueness of the Harvest Halton event be defined and used in marketing – whether this is the event location, the restaurants/farmers being showcased, a unique theme (e.g. heritage cooking methods) or a combination of all three. For example, is it the event theme that draws the crowd e.g. a harvest "picnic" or is it the live musical entertainment or the guest celebrity chefs? Is it the high quality food or limited, signature versions of a food or drink item (e.g. Cask Days in Toronto offers a taste of unique cask beer made just for the event).

It is also OCTA's recommendation that both the restaurant and agricultural community

be engaged before confirming the event date. Both stakeholder groups are critical to the success of the event. It may be challenging to request chefs to attend the event and leave their kitchen on a Saturday afternoon or evening in October, even if the consumer may be more likely to visit the Region on a Saturday. A Sunday afternoon event may be better for the stakeholders to get involved and therefore support the event.

Restaurants that are currently offering a "taste of Halton" on their menus and are supporting local growers and producers should be contacted to participate in the event (these restaurants have been identified as "*champions*" and "*leaders*" by the Experience Assessment Tool™). "*Follower*" rated businesses in the Region should also be contacted as well as these businesses are on the border of being "market ready" from an agri and food tourism perspective. By participating in this event, the Region has the opportunity to show businesses that agri and food tourism adds value to their business and is therefore a worthwhile investment.

It is critical that the Committee consider regional demographics and focus on creating community ambassadors and attracting locals to the event by leveraging the established customer base of the farmer and chef/restaurateur event participants. The Harvest Halton programming should be planned in such a way that it can grow to attract more guests from outside the Region.

EVENT PARTICIPANT CRITERIA AND REGULATORY MEASURES

Regulating that the participating restaurants are using locally sourced products and farmers are growing the food they sell will be important to maintaining the integrity of the event. A critical mass of participating farmers and restaurants will also be necessary for the perceived success of a tasting event to the consumer.

According to the stakeholder meeting, the event is being organized to showcase the restaurants in the region that are sourcing local food, however, the results of EAT™ and the SWOT analysis (detailed in Chapter 6 and Appendix F) indicated that very few restaurants are sourcing products from within Halton Region. The Region, therefore has the opportunity to champion those restaurants that are sourcing local Halton food (and promoting this to the consumer), while encouraging other restaurants in the region to source local in order to participate in the event and receive the associated marketing value. It will be extremely important for the Region to give the interested restaurants the tools and guidance necessary to source their products locally and put regulatory measures into place to make sure "Halton sourced" food is being showcased at the event.

EVENT PARTICIPANT APPLICATION

Businesses interested in participating in the Harvest Halton event must complete an application form. A form will need to be created for each business sector: Farmer, Restaurant and Beverage Company (Winery, Brewery, Cidery, etc.).

The application package will include a letter with background information on the event including the vision, mission and the goals, the Committee, the charity and the "What's In It For Me" (WIIFM) details. The application form will clearly outline the cost to participate in the event (cash and/or in-kind), the expectations of both the participant

and the event, the event structure and if there is a way for participating businesses to recover their cost or generate revenue through their participation.

Consider all information required from the participants in order to build the event's marketing materials – both for advance marketing materials and on-site signage. For example: Will the event brochure include the chef's name and the restaurant name with address? Will the chef be present at the event? Will it include the menu, a recipe, a business Twitter handle, vegetarian, vegan or gluten-free choices, etc.?

Once the participants have been approved by the Committee, a confirmation letter outlining the event details – complete with load in and out information, electricity, refrigeration and supplies available on-site. Each food vendor will be required to complete and pass a municipality Health Inspection to participate in the event. It is also recommended that each vendor provide proof of liability insurance.

EVENT PARTICIPANT RESOURCES

Participants should have access to tools and resources that will contribute to the event's success. Possible resources include:

- List of Local Farmers with contact information (or the Committee could pair the restaurant with a farmer to increase the profile of local food)
- Preferred Supplier List (based on the event's environmental policy)
  ** This is a good idea if the restaurants supply their own biodegradable plates, cutlery, etc.*
- Marketing Suggestions – an outline of how to support the event through the business's marketing efforts
- Event Venue Maps with load in/out information
- Municipality Health Form and Safe Food Handling Guidelines

EVENT PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of event organizers and the participating businesses should be clearly outlined in the application package. This section will give the Committee the opportunity to showcase the WIIFM for businesses to participate. The responsibilities should include items such as what is expected the day of the event, supplies organized by the restaurant vs. supplies organized by the Committee and expected donations of time, product and/or staff resources.

BRANDING

The branding of Harvest Halton should be consistent with the Pumpkin Trail brand and aligned with the overall tourism brand(s) of the Region. As the market for events has increasingly become more competitive, effective communication of the event's brand has also become more important. Harvest Halton needs to have a brand of its own to communicate its specific message and goals. Events that stand out on their own are more likely to gain the attention of the target audience.

While building the brand of the event, the Committee should consider the following questions:

- How do you want your target audience to view your event?

- What emotions and feelings should the Harvest Halton evoke?
- How do you want your audience to interact with the tourism brand of Halton Region before, during and after the event?

Successfully branded events motivate a target audience to future action. When an event has the right people in attendance, there is a significant opportunity to create movement among the core demographic.

Take the time to consider other goals of the event, which may be independent of the ultimate goal (i.e. selling more product). Is the goal to increase visitors to the region? To view Halton as an agri and food destination in the eyes of the consumer? To engage more restaurants in the Region? To eat more local food?

Evaluate these goals and determine how you will measure success. Create takeaways for guests that are consistent with the event's brand and goals to effectively motivate attendees. For example, event attendees could receive a Harvest Halton card listing each participating restaurant, beverage supplier and/or farm. The card is valid for a small discount or some sort of incentive to the customer, which encourages the customer to dine at the restaurant or buys local in future from one of the farmers at a local Halton Farmers Market. Events present significant opportunities for an audience to more actively engage with your brand and should be leveraged to generate sales for the participants.

MARKETING AND MEDIA STRATEGY

No two events are alike. Find your audience by promoting the uniqueness and value of your event. Here are some simple tips for promoting your event:

1. Establish a presence - this can be a website that explains your event, participating businesses and content
2. Create a branded Facebook and Twitter page dedicated to your event (Instagram and Pinterest are also recommended)
3. Send out press releases
4. Send out direct e-mailings to contacts through the Region and/or partners – continuously build this database
5. Engage participating businesses to add a post/logo with a link to their website and Facebook announcing they will be attending the event.
6. Encourage participating businesses to be active on Twitter by tweeting and retweeting using the event hashtag
7. Contact like-minded organizations and regional colleges and universities with information about the event
8. Engage the participating businesses through social media - like their Facebook pages, follow them on Twitter and express excitement over having them involved in the event. *Tip: When on their site, promote the participant - NOT the event.*
9. Contact agri and food focused organizations to create partnerships and alliances - view other events or products as opportunities for cross-promotion and future alliances, not competition
10. List the event on FREE event and community calendars (e.g. OCTA's Ontario-wide event calendar)
11. Create VIP tickets to invite media on the day of the event for an exclusive experience

12. Organize a launch event prior to the event to celebrate the event with stakeholders, sponsors and media – this will increase the likelihood of advance media coverage
13. Strategic Print and On-line Marketing is recommended. It is important to build a loyal following of local ambassadors for the event, who will then share the event with friends and relatives with pride. It is recommended that the Region form partnerships with local media to advertise the event. As the event grows and attracts tourists, the marketing and advertising strategy will change and grow to reflect the desired audience.

Post-Event Evaluation

An on-site survey and follow up e-mail survey sent to ticket holders and participating businesses provides vital information that can be used to improve the event in future years. The survey instrument must be carefully constructed in order to exclude bias.

The following data could be collected from the event attendees:

- Age
- Gender
- Average household income
- Group size
- Group make-up – families, couples, visitors on their own
- Postal code
- Whether this is a return visit (after year one)
- How much do they spend at the event?
- How did they hear about the event?
- Whether the event was the primary reason for visiting the region

Event specific questions will provide detailed feedback around the event logistics. These questions could include:

- Car parking
- Site signage
- Opening remarks
- Event printed materials
- Food and beverage participants
- Most memorable/favourite vendor/experience
- Event entertainment
- Quality of the event
- Value for money
- Returning to a future event
- Helpers and volunteers with whom they came into contact

Post event evaluation measures the outcomes of the event in relation to its objectives. It is an important tool for enabling more informed decisions and more efficient planning and greatly improves the outcomes of future events. Most potential sponsors and some grant giving agencies will look to see that post event evaluation has been

performed.

A debrief should be conducted with all stakeholders and committee members. This may be done at a single 'debriefing' meeting or at a series of meetings, depending on the complexity of the event. It is often useful for an agenda to be circulated before the meeting, with the plan of discussing every aspect of the event in detail and making suggestions for future improvement.

EVENT BUDGET

A special event must have a detailed annual budget, which includes realistic notes on how the numbers in the budget were estimated.

There are two different types of costs to consider when creating the budget – Variable and Fixed. Variable costs (e.g. number of table and chairs rented, food costs) will change with the level of festival attendance, the length of the festival, etc.; while fixed costs (e.g. insurance and marketing) will remain the same regardless of the number of people that attend the event.

Ticketing

The cost of admission to the event may be determined by adding the event budget plus expected profit margin, then dividing by the number of estimated guests; or by considering the ticket price of similar food events in the province and developing a similar ticketing structure.

Beware of the dangers of under pricing or over pricing an event. If the price is very low it can undervalue the event in the mind of the potential visitors. Over pricing may create unrealistic expectations for the visitor.

It is important to the consumer to have the ability to research and purchase tickets online and receive instant confirmation. The consumer expects this form of customer service and recent studies indicate that a potential customer will in fact move on from a website if the clear and concise information is not available and the ability to instantly purchase a ticket is missing.

The Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance has developed a partnership with EzTix, an easy to use, e-ticketing service that offers reduced rates for OCTA members (of which Halton Region is one). EzTix provides a self-managed interface that gives the event organizer real-time ticket statistics, while offering the consumer the ability to pay online for the event and receive an e-ticket.

Marketing Partnerships – Sponsorships

Sponsorship is an excellent way to offset an event budget or expand and enhance the event programming through the support of a new partner. Sponsoring businesses and organizations support events for the opportunity to connect through experiences with the event attendees. Sponsors expect to receive some tangible benefits in return for their support. It is important to consider both the event needs and the potential partners' needs, and look both at the benefits of having that sponsorship for the event and the likely benefits that the sponsor will receive in return.

In-kind Partnerships

Building in-kind partnerships with community businesses should be a win-win for both partners. It provides the event with additional ways to relieve budget costs with donations of products related to the budget, while giving a business the opportunity to support the event (if cash is not possible).

Event Operations and Production

The more serious issues regarding the production of events include risk management, key aspects of insurance, health, safety and licensing requirements. The health and safety requirements differ in each municipality and county of Ontario. It is imperative that the Committee Chair be well versed in the regulations affecting the event.

An overview of the operational activities that take place immediately prior to, and during an event must also be performed. Efficient preparation and due thought to operational issues will reduce the risk of something going wrong.

THE CRITICAL PATH AND PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

The Critical Path is a detailed document that outlines the necessary steps to be completed with milestone dates, task status and documented task delegation. The Critical Path is a living record that ensures critical milestones are achieved and tasks are adhered to.

The Production Schedule will ensure the various requirements for the event are in place, in the correct order and at the right time. It is a detailed list of tasks with specific start and stop times, from set up or load in of the event equipment through to the eventual removal of all the equipment or load out.

The Schedule is often presented in the form of a Gantt chart illustrating time, activity, location and responsibility. The chart will visually summarize the project schedule, becoming an effective communication and management tool (particularly with volunteers), showing how different aspects of the event production are interdependent and notifying organizers of problem areas or scheduling clashes.

Milestone Dates

These are important dates during the year by which time sensitive key actions must occur. Failure of completion by these dates may compromise the success of the event in some way. These dates must be static dates and be outlined clearly in the Critical Path.

Example milestone dates include deadlines for sponsorship, programming, license applications, grant applications, venue and rentals confirmation, printing of marketing materials and e-ticket registration set up.

Volunteer Program

Volunteers are a critical component of any large event. In many instances volunteers constitute the bulk of the workforce for these events. A volunteer program should be put into place with a dedicated volunteer coordinator. The Committee should define

possible jobs for volunteers and do their best to match a volunteer's talents with the position.

The Volunteer Program should include an outreach strategy to recruit volunteers (an online application form is best), advance training, a volunteer management strategy including protocol for the day of the event and a volunteer rewards program.

Risk Assessment

An assessment of risk should be carried out in advance of the event to determine potential risks to the consumer, volunteers and staff. During the assessment, potential hazards, risks associated with that hazards, risk management (how will the Committee control those identified risks) and the rating (low, medium, high or very high risk) of the hazard should all be considered.

Hazards can be grouped under the following headings, but the list must be specific to the event: Spectators, Fire, Electrical, Weather, Noise, Waste. The Risk Assessment will form the basis for the Health & Safety Statement.

A Health & Safety Statement is designed to safeguard the Committee and event attendees from incident and accident. It will also help prove to an external party that the Committee took responsible steps to minimize the risk of accidents. The Statement should include mentions of policies and regulations followed by sub-contracted caterers and suppliers.

Emergency Procedures

The document should detail exactly what the emergency procedures to be followed are, under a given set of circumstances. Ideally this document should be discussed with the emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance etc.) well in advance of the event and they should be given a copy of the document. If emergency services are on site or are called to the event site, they may wish to take over the emergency procedures. The document must identify clearly the decision maker, their contact details and the chain of command.

Insurance

It is essential that the Committee Chair examines and updates the insurance requirements on an annual basis. The insurance company should have full knowledge of the event with all possible risks and liabilities.

Licenses and Permissions

Licenses and Permission needed for an event depend on the location of the event, private vs. public property and the municipal and county regulations. It is recommended that the Committee Chair meet with municipal authorities to determine the licenses required for the specific event.

CONCLUSION

Delivering an authentic “taste of place” through an event not only builds regional identity, it supports the local food movement and fosters a sense of community between farmers, chefs, restaurateurs and consumers. An event that successfully engages the community becomes a product of that community and builds pride among its citizens. When this outpouring of pride becomes evident outside regional borders, it becomes a significant attractor for agri and food tourists looking to sip, sample and savour an authentic experience. The recommendations contained in this chapter are intended to provide guidance and support for the Harvest Halton event.

With an engaged group of stakeholders, an established Event Committee and Halton Region taking a leadership role, there is every reason to believe that this signature event will be a success.

8E. PICNIC PROGRAM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING CAMPAIGN

PRIORITY: 2

TIMING: 2013 – Educate and Engage
2014 – Product Development, Marketing Campaign

ROLE OF THE REGION: Educate and Engage; Product Development facilitation, Lead Branding & Marketing

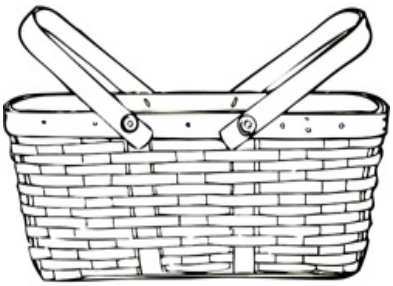
INTRODUCTION

As the SWOT analysis identified, opportunities exist to create picnic packages that will increase visitor spending and time in the region, strengthen connections between agri and food tourism business operators and promote the wealth of natural, outdoor attractions that Halton Region has to offer.

Combining delicious fare sourced directly from the region with the natural beauty of Halton's conservation land, waterfront and provincial parks (which are already equipped with picnic facilities) provides a truly authentic, unique experience for locals and visitors and an opportunity to establish Halton as the premier picnicking destination in the province.

It is recommended that the Region facilitate workshops and engage businesses along the local food supply chain (farms, retailers, restaurants, attractions and accommodations) to create partnerships and packages. It is further recommended that Halton Region develop a picnicking marketing campaign to promote these packages and help set the region apart from competing jurisdictions. Businesses with picnic facilities could also be identified with a picnic table or picnic basket icon on the expanded *Simply Local* program.

WHAT COULD BE INCLUDED IN A HALTON SOURCED PICNIC BASKET?



Fresh fruit (strawberries, blueberries, pears, plums...)
Fresh produce (carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes...)
Prepared salads using Halton sourced vegetables
Freshly baked bread and pastries from a local bakery
Soups and stews
Apple cider
Sandwiches using local bread, charcuterie & pickles
Jams, jellies, preserves and salsa
Artisanal chocolates using local ingredients

WHO COULD BE INVOLVED?

- Farms (especially those with an on-farm market and value added products)
- Farmers' markets
- Retailers
- Quick-Serve Restaurants/Cafés
- Accommodations
- Attractions
- Equine Experiences
- Culinary Schools
- Conservation Areas, Provincial Parks (or, are these attractions?)

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL PICNIC PROGRAMMING CONCEPTS & PACKAGING

Some businesses could function as the pick up point for these baskets or "pic-me-ups" (e.g. retailers, restaurants, farmers' markets, accommodations, culinary schools) while others could serve as the destination point/picnic venue (e.g. conservation areas, provincial parks, other attractions).

Farms could function as both a pick up point and a venue, as several farms in the region have designated picnic areas. Incorporating/promoting a picnic program at these farms would increase their market readiness from an agri and food tourist's perspective, as it would create another way for visitors to experience the farm. At farmers' markets, visitors could purchase or bring their own basket and then have it filled by vendors at the market.

A picnic component could be incorporated at equine attractions, especially at those ranches offering trail riding. Visitors could be encouraged to pick up their locally sourced picnic lunch at participating partners around the region or equine businesses could co-ordinate with these partners and arrange to have picnic baskets available on-site.

A "pic-me-up" picnic package could be created through partnerships between retailers/restaurants and accommodation providers. A filled picnic basket could be included with an overnight stay, along with a map of conservation areas in the region and/or passes to an outdoor attraction (e.g. Glen Eden, Royal Botanical Gardens).

Benefits

- Leverages conservation and natural assets of region
- Provides a secondary "take away" experience for participating businesses to increase their tourism offerings and market readiness
- Increases visitor time spent at destination and in the Region overall
- Increases visitor spend in Region
- Strengthens connections along agri and food tourism value chain
- Promotes natural (four-season) outdoor attractions (see Chapter 8f)
- Attracts agri, food tourists along with eco *and* adventure tourists

- Aligns with Public Health initiatives (Health & Wellness promotion)
- Could be used to enhance *Simply Local* program (e.g. identify Picnic Partners with an icon)

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO EXECUTE THE PROGRAM IN HALTON?

Halton's picnic program is currently still a concept. Bringing the program into existence will require the participation of a critical mass of market ready businesses committed to sourcing locally. Communication, partnerships and cross-promotion between these businesses is also essential. If executed properly, this program will connect stakeholders along the tourism value chain and strengthen the region's agri and food tourism offerings as a whole.

STEP 1: EDUCATE & ENGAGE

It is recommended that Halton Region begin with outreach to "*followers*" and "*subscribers*", along with unrated businesses within the region's agritourism value chain through workshops designed to develop new offerings or improve existing offerings. "*Champion*" and "*leader*" rated businesses interested in participating in the picnic program should also be contacted to participate in the Experience Development workshops as they may provide valuable guidance for other businesses in their sector and act as best practice models.

Representatives from Conservation Halton, Credit Valley Conservation and Bronte Creek Provincial Park should also be contacted, as Halton's many natural attractions are already well-established picnic destinations.

Recommended Workshops:

- Farmer Workshops: Value-Adding, Risk Management & Liability, Farm Accessible to Tourists, Direct Procurement Partnerships (Producers)
- Agri and Food Tourism Value Chain Businesses: Experience Development
- Restaurants: Direct Procurement Partnerships

STEP 2: PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT

It is recommended that Halton Region facilitate package development by creating partnership opportunities between businesses along the value chain. This could be accomplished through networking events and/or directly engaging with businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain.

- Local Food Summit (See Chapter 8a)
- Annual Tourism Week Celebration Event
- Packaging Workshops with Market Ready Businesses

STEP 3: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Communication and cross-promotion between these businesses is key to marketing Halton as Ontario's premier picnic destination. Tools and tactics for effective package and campaign marketing include:

- Workshop: Guide to Promotions, Social Media, Marketing
- Campaign Messaging; integration across website, advertising, social media
- Promotion of market-ready packages on Halton Region Tourism Website and through social media channels
- Contesting through social media using a hashtag (e.g. #picmeupHalton)
- Promotion of packages at individual businesses
- Media FAMs
- Outreach to media (e.g. dropping a picnic basket with Halton sourced edibles at local TV and radio stations, newspaper offices, etc.)
- Promotion of market-ready packages through Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) #3 website

Human Resources:

- Host a workshop for all conservation partners and retailers to talk about creating a picnic program to run all four seasons
- Host a workshop to help interested businesses connect with local food and drink suppliers/farmers
- Create toolkit for interested businesses to initiate picnic programming
- Develop marketing and promotional materials to identify picnic partners
- Potentially create map of picnic partners/sites in the Region (or incorporate picnic program into *Simply Local* map)

Financial Resources:

- Funds for hosting workshops
- Funds for marketing and promotional materials, if created

8F. FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING

PRIORITY: 1

TIMING: 2013 – Educate and Engage
2014 – Product Development and Marketing Campaign

ROLE OF THE REGION: Facilitator, Branding and Marketing (Lead)

INTRODUCTION

Opportunities exist to create both seasonal and year-round products and packages that will promote the unique visitor experiences in Halton. As with the development of Halton as a picnic destination (see Chapter 8e), effective promotion and development of these products will increase visitor spending and time in the region, strengthen connections between agri and food tourism business operators and promote the wealth of natural, outdoor attractions in the area.

It is recommended that the Region facilitate workshops to engage farms to develop agritourism experiences and to engage agri and food tourism businesses to create partnerships and packages. It is further recommended that Halton Region develop a four-season marketing campaign to promote these packages and help set the region apart from neighbouring markets.

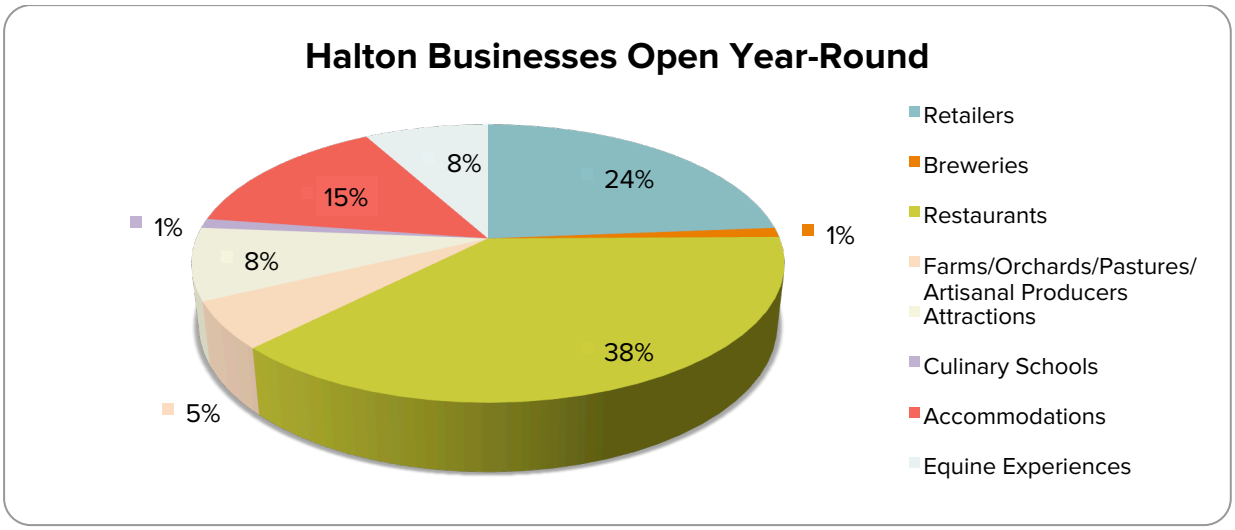
From the distinct landforms and impressive vistas of the Niagara Escarpment to the expansive outdoor conservation and waterfront areas, Halton Region offers a stunning scenic backdrop that changes with every season. Sport and adventure activities that include hiking, cycling, fishing, geocaching, rock climbing and snowshoeing are also available throughout the year.

Visits to Halton Region by Calendar Quarter (in 000s)				
Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2006	682	709	857	727
2007	700	671	868	759
2008	702	717	936	767

Source: Regional Tourism Profiles 2006-2008 Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Visits to the Region are spread equally across the calendar year, with a slightly higher number of visitors during the third quarter – in July, August and September (*Regional Tourism Profiles*, 2006-2008). With multiple festivals and events taking place each month and the majority of attractions, restaurants, retailers and accommodations open year-round, opportunities exist to develop full year packages that will increase visits to the Region across all four seasons.

Of the 437 listings in the inventory, 285 of these businesses are open year-round. The majority of these businesses are restaurants, retailers and accommodations.



Of these full year attractions, 227 (80%) of these businesses have a local food and/or drink component. Fourteen of these businesses were identified as market ready, having received a *"champion"* or *"leader"* rating during the SWOT analysis. Another 54 of these year-round businesses were near market ready, having received a *"follower"* rating. The remaining "*subscriber*" rated businesses are not yet considered market ready but show some level of commitment to local food and/or drink.

Total Full Year Businesses in Inventory	Total Full Year Businesses with Local Food and/or Drink	Market Ready Businesses Open Full Year	Near Market Ready Businesses Open Full Year
285	227 (80%)	14 (5%)	54 (19%)

This indicates that there is a substantial pool of businesses to draw from for developing Halton as a four-season destination. However, as a large percentage of these businesses are not currently meeting the expectations of agri and food tourists, it is recommended that the Region facilitate market readiness workshops in Year 1 to help businesses develop agritourism experiences and/or improve their experience assessment ratings first.

Four-season packaging would help to support agriculture both during the growing and "off-season". While most farms and farmers' markets are not open year round, these agri and food tourism attractions do present opportunities to create seasonal packages and promotions that highlight the variety of agricultural products available throughout the growing season. Pickled, preserved and canned items made from Halton products are another way to extend the growing season and if made available at restaurants, retailers, culinary markets, attractions and even accommodations, they can offer agri and food tourists a taste of Halton all year long. Further, through education of the farming community on the benefits of agritourism more farms could offer on-farm experiences during both the growing and "off-season"

WHO COULD BE INVOLVED?

Year-round

- Attractions
  e.g. Royal Botanical Gardens, Joseph Brant Museum, Bronte Creek Provincial Park, Conservation Halton parks, Credit Valley Conservation parks, Mohawk Racetrack
- Equine Experiences
- Accommodations
- Restaurants
- Retailers
- Breweries
- Culinary Schools
- Farms/Orchards/Pastures/Artisanal Producers/Other

Seasonally

- Farmers' Markets
- Festivals and Events
- Fruit Winery

EXAMPLES OF POTENTAL YEAR ROUND AND SEASONAL PACKAGES AND PROGRAMMING

Accommodation providers could partner with festival organizers, restaurants, farms, equine experiences, breweries and other attractions to create seasonal and/or year round packages. Attractions that could be leveraged to create these packages may include the Taste of Burlington dining series, summer festivals at Country Heritage Park, harvest festivals at local farms or horseback riding adventures. As the SWOT analysis identified, one accommodation in the Region is already offering a Maple Fun Festival package that promotes the Maple Syrup Festival at Bronte Creek Provincial Park.

By leveraging the picnic program (see Chapter 8e), four-season packages could be cross-promoted between picnic providers (e.g. farms, retailers, quick serve restaurants) and natural attractions in the area. These natural attractions, including Halton and Credit Valley's numerous conservation parks and Bronte Creek Provincial Park are all open-year round. Working again with accommodation providers, packages could be created to attract not only agri and food tourists but adventure and sports tourists as well. The demand for these packages is evident - between 2008 and 2010, 12-16% of all visitors to the Region participated in an outdoor or sport activity (*Halton Region Economic Review*, 2012). This totalled 350,000-500,000 visits.

Of the equine experiences that accept tourists, 90% of these are open year-round. Increased awareness through marketing and promotion of these stables' four-seasonality could help drive visitors to the Region outside of the peak tourist season. Sleigh rides and winter campfires are available at several equine experiences in the region. In addition, one equine experience has a covered wagon available for

camping during the summer, as well as a fully equipped bed and breakfast available during the colder months.

Natural attractions and museums could potentially be used as concert venues throughout the year, creating a new area of programming to attract tourists.

As discussed in Chapter 8b: Enhancing the *Simply Local* Program, the current focus of Halton's *Simply Local* program is the agritourism attractions (farms, farmers' markets, agricultural fairs, garden centres and equine experiences) in the Region. By establishing criteria and a certification program that will allow the program to expand to restaurants, retailers, accommodations, breweries and other attractions, the *Simply Local* program could be an excellent promotional piece to showcase these full year attractions.

BENEFITS

- Leverages conservation and natural assets of region
- Increases visitor time spent at destination and in the Region overall
- Increases visitor spend in Region
- Strengthens connections along agri and food tourism value chain
- Attracts agri, food, eco *and* adventure tourists
- Highlights seasonality of agricultural products
- Increases total visits to Region (seasonally and annually)

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO PROMOTE HALTON AS A FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION?

In order to create packages that leverage Halton's agri and food tourism attractions throughout the year, there must be a critical mass of businesses that are meeting or exceeding the expectations of agri and food tourists.

STEP 1: EDUCATE & ENGAGE

It is recommended that Halton Region begin with outreach to "*followers*" and "*subscribers*", along with unrated businesses within the region's agritourism value chain through workshops designed to develop new offerings or improve existing offerings. "*Champion*" and "*leader*" rated businesses should also be encouraged to participate in the Experience Development workshops as they may provide valuable guidance for other businesses in their sector and act as best practice models.

Recommended Workshops:

- Farmer Workshop: Value-Adding
- Farmer Workshop: Risk Management & Liability
- Farmer Workshop: Farm Accessible to Tourists
- Farmer Workshop: Direct Procurement Partnerships (Producers)
- Agri and Food Tourism Value Chain Businesses: Experience Development

- Restaurants: Direct Procurement Partnerships

Note: Additional Workshop details are provided in Chapter 9.

STEP 2: PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT

It is recommended that Halton Region facilitate package development by creating partnership opportunities between businesses along the value chain. This could be accomplished through networking events and/or directly engaging with businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain. Some recommendations include:

- Local Food Summit (See Chapter 8a)
- Annual Tourism Week Celebration Event
- Packaging Workshops with Market Ready Businesses

STEP 3: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Communication and cross-promotion between these businesses is key to executing this marketing Halton as a four-season destination. Tools and tactics for effective package and campaign marketing include:

- Workshop: Guide to Promotions, Social Media, Marketing
- Campaign Messaging; integration across website, advertising, social media
- Promotion of market-ready packages on Halton Region Tourism Website and through social media channels
- Promotion of packages at individual businesses
- Media FAMs
- Promotion of market-ready packages through Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) #3 website

Human Resources

- Organize and facilitate workshops

Financial Resources

- Funds for hosting workshops
- Funds for hosting networking events
- Potential funds for marketing/promotional materials

9. EDUCATION & WORKSHOPS

As identified throughout this Action Plan, Halton Region has a strong role to play in terms of engaging and educating farms and other businesses along the agri and food tourism value chain. This is fundamental to successful destination and product/experience development.

For Halton, specific engagement and education are required to:

1. Improve the local food supply chain to increase the number of channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products
2. Increase the number of "market-ready" agritourism businesses by:

    a) Encouraging (and providing support to) farms to diversify their revenue streams by developing on-farm visitor experiences
    b) Providing educational tools and resources to existing "*follower*" and "*subscriber*" rated agri and food tourism businesses to address key challenges identified through EAT:

        - Depth of Local Food and Drink Tastes/Experiences
        - Promotion and Marketing of Local Food and Drink Offerings
        - Connections Between Farmers and Off-Farm Sales Channels
        - Customer Service
        - Social Media
        - Secondary Experience/Program Development

3. Increase the number and promotion of market ready Halton-wide experiences and packages by engaging with "*champions*", "*leaders*" and other near-market ready businesses.

It is recommended that the Region take an active role in engaging and educating agritourism stakeholders in support of the above objectives by offering a series of networking events, seminars, toolkits and resources. While engagement and education is an ongoing effort, it is recommended that the Region place particular importance on this initiative in Year 1 to help lay the foundation for successful, sustainable product development.

It should be noted that educational material and workshops in support of the above objectives have been developed by other organizations, including the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA), the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF), the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) and others. It is OCTA's recommendation that Halton Region leverage these organizations where possible and promote/coordinate relevant workshops and resources for existing and potential agri and food tourism businesses in the region. This chapter also outlines tools and resources available to the Region to assist in delivering these programs.

PROGRAM #1: Improve the local supply chain to increase the number of channels through which tourists can taste and experience Halton's agricultural products.

AUDIENCE(s): Farms, Restaurants, Attractions, Accommodations, etc.

EDUCATION PROGRAM	FORM OF DELIVERY	BY WHO	AUDIENCE	SOURCE MATERIAL	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	DESIRED OUTCOME / PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Existing Workshops						
DPPs – For Producers	- Workshop or - Webinar	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA - Consultant or - Self-led webinar	Local food producers of all types	Farm to Cafeteria Canada, OMAF, Greenbelt, Sustain Ontario, Jane Eckert, Eat Local Sudbury, Ottawa Valley Food Co-op, Wendy's Mobile Market	- Promotion - Guest speaker / Consultant - Space - Materials - Refreshments	- Distribution challenges addressed - Increase partnerships in region
DPPs – For Restaurants	- Workshop or - Webinar	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA - Consultant or - Self-led webinar	Restaurants, Retailers, Accommodation and food providers of all types	OCTA, Greenbelt (for institutions)	- Promotion - Guest speaker / Consultant - Space - Materials - Refreshments	- Distribution challenges addressed - Increase partnerships in region
Existing Toolkits						
Chef's Resource Guide	- Toolkit - Webinar	- OCTA	Restaurants, Accommodation Providers, Retailers and food providers of all types	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region or participants) - Materials	- Chefs / buyers understand the farmer's language; learn the value of & how to showcase local food - Encourage collaboration - Strengthen local supply chain
Farmers' Resource Guide	- Toolkit - Webinar	- OCTA	Local food producers of all types	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region or participants) - Materials	- Farmers understand the needs of their buyers and how direct sales can benefit their business and the local food economy - Encourage collaboration and build partnerships - Strengthen l supply chain

Halton Developed Initiative for Education & Engagement						
How To Guide: Planning a Regional Food Summit	- Toolkit - Webinar - Event	- OCTA - Event hosted by Halton Region Ontario Regional Food Summit	- All agri and food tourism value chain businesses in the Halton Region - Media - Agri and food interest groups - Students	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region) - Hosting event costs - Toolkit Development for Halton Region Agri and/ or Committee of Interested Stakeholders	- Encourage collaboration - Strengthen local food supply chain - Increase community support - Educate stakeholders in gaps/opportunities
How to "Farmer-Chef Meet & Greet"	- Toolkit - Webinar - Event	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA	- Toolkit for Halton Region and stakeholders - Halton Chefs, Accommodation, Retailers & Buyers with Farmers, Producers	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region) - Hosting event costs	- Encourage collaboration and build partnerships - Strengthen local food supply chain - Increase local food presence on menus in region

PROGRAM #2a) Encourage farms to diversify their revenue streams by offering on-farm visitor experiences. Provide necessary support for experience development.

AUDIENCE: Farms not currently offering an agritourism experience.

EDUCATION PROGRAM	FORM OF DELIVERY	BY WHO	AUDIENCE	SOURCE MATERIAL	BUDGET	DESIRED OUTCOME / PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Resource Sharing						
Agricultural Business Management	Information package	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF)	Farmers and new farmers	OMAF Factsheet	Distribution and promotion of information packages: omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/agbusdev.html	- Increase number of successful farm businesses in the region
Risk Management & Liability	Information package	OMAF	Farmers and new farmers	OMAF Factsheet	Distribution of information packages: omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/10-027.htm omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/06-087.htm	- Farmers understand risks associated with on- farm visitors and have tools to manage them - Increase # of agritourism businesses in region
Value Adding	- Workshop - Webinar - Virtual learning community	- Hosted by OMAF - Self-led	Business owners	OMAF's training resource: EVAO (Exploring Value Added Opportunities)	- Promotion	- Increase # of businesses that diversify revenues by adding value - Increase number of experiences
Farm Accessible to Tourists	- Workshop, or - Webinar	- OCTA - Consultant or - Self-led	Farmers	OMAF, OCTA, Jane Eckert, TIAO	- Promotion - Guest speaker / Consultant - Space - Materials - Refreshments	- Increase # of farms with tourist component -Increase # of agri and food tourist offerings in region
New Farmers Project (Land Access, Financial Management, Crop Production, Marketing)	- Webinar	- Self-led	Farmers and new farmers	University of Vermont Extension	- Promotion	- Increase # of successful farm businesses in the region

PROGRAM #2b) Provide tools and resources to existing "*follower*" and "*subscriber*" rated agri and food tourism businesses to address key challenges identified through EAT™ (outside of local food procurement challenges which are addressed in Program #1).

AUDIENCE: "*Follower*", "*subscriber*" and un-rated businesses. "*Champion*" and "*leader*" rated businesses should also be engaged, as they may provide valuable insight during the workshop and assume a mentoring role.

EAT™ Identified Issue	FORM OF DELIVERY	BY WHO	AUDIENCE	SOURCE MATERIAL	BUDGET	DESIRED OUTCOME / PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Marketing and Promotion of Local Sourcing	- Workshop - Webinar - Toolkit	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA led	All agri and food tourism value chain businesses	OCTA	- Promotion - Guest speaker - Space - Materials - Refreshments	- Workshop or - Webinar
Experience Development	- Workshop or - Webinar	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA - Tourism Consultant - CTC	All agri and food tourism value chain businesses	OCTA	- Promotion - Guest speaker - Space - Materials -Refreshments	Experience Development
Sector and/or Program Specific Experience Development	- Workshop or - Webinar	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA - Tourism Consultant - CTC	Specific workshops targeted at: - Equestrian Sector - Picnic Program - Four Season Program	OCTA	- Promotion - Guest speaker - Space - Materials - Refreshments	Experience Development
Accessibility Standards for Customer Service	- Workshop or - Webinar	- OTEC	All agri and food tourism value chain businesses	Partnership between TIAO, OTEC and Ontario Government	- Promotion - Space - Materials - Refreshments	Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
Customer Service	- Workshop or - Webinar	- Hosted by Halton Region - OCTA	All agri and food tourism value chain businesses	OCTA	- Promotion - Guest speaker - Space - Materials - Refreshments	Customer Service

PROGRAM #3: Increase the number and promotion of market ready Halton-wide experiences and packages.

AUDIENCE: "*Champions*", "*leaders*" and other near-market ready businesses

PROGRAM	FORM OF DELIVERY	BY WHO	AUDIENCE	SOURCE MATERIAL	BUDGET	DESIRED OUTCOME / PERFORMANCE MEASURES
Guide to Membership & Verification	- Toolkit - Webinar	- OCTA	- Toolkit for Halton Region Agri and/ or Committee of Interested Stakeholders	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region or participants)	Guide to Membership & Verification
Media Relations	- Toolkit - Webinar	- OCTA	- Toolkit for Halton Region	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region	Media Relations Guide

Guide			Agri and/ or Committee of Interested Stakeholders		or participants)	
Guide to Experiential Travel	- Toolkit - Workshop	CTC	- Agri and Food Tourism Champions and Leaders - Toolkit for Halton Region and/or Committee of Interested Stakeholders	CTC - http://en-corporate.canada.travel/sites/default/files/pdf/Resources/sec_exptoolkit_lores_final.pdf	- Promotion and distribution of materials - Workshop related costs	Guide to Experiential Travel
Creating a Culinary Tourism Regional Inventory Using EAT™	- Toolkit - Webinar	- OCTA	Halton Region	OCTA	- Access fee (paid by Region or participants)	Creating a Culinary Tourism Regional Inventory Using EAT™

Additional Toolkits and Resources Include:

ORGANIZATION	AREA OF EXPERTISE	WEBSITE
Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance Four Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan	The vision of the Strategy is to ensure that: by 2015, culinary tourism in Ontario is valued as a leading contributor to a vibrant and sustainable tourism economy in the province. It sets out the menu of steps and sub-strategies to achieve this vision and ensure this sector is economically, culturally and socially sustainable. There are solid opportunities to make this happen – across all regions of Ontario.	http://ontarioculinary.com/about/strategy
Agricultural Marketing Resource Center	Based out of Iowa State University, the AgMRC functions as a national information resource for value-added agriculture. The website offers business development tools, shares industry trends and hosts an annual conference on value-added agriculture.	http://www.agmrc.org/
Canadian Farm Business Management Council (CFBMC)	In 2004, the CFBMC published Cultivating Agritourism: Tools & Techniques for Building Success, a booklet available for sale on their website that includes practical tools and techniques for farmers and ranchers interested in agritourism.	http://www.farmcentre.com/
University of California Small Farm Program (UC Small Farm Program)	Numerous agritourism resources are available on the UC Small Farm Program website, including case studies, fact sheets, business planning and management resources and publications. The organization also publishes a newsletter highlighting agritourism in California.	http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/

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