



Report 2018-122

Committee Information Report

To: Chair and Members of the Community Development Advisory Committee

From: Alison Vandervelde, Community Development Officer

Date of meeting: October 11, 2018

Re: **Community Development Advisory Committee – Open Farms in Frontenac 2018**

Recommendation

Be It Resolved That the County of Frontenac continue to coordinate the “Open Farms in Frontenac” event in 2019;

And Further That \$4,000 be included in the 2019 Economic Development budget to address costs associated with coordinating and marketing the Open Farms event.

Background

In late 2017 Frontenac Ambassador Dave Perry of Perry Farm contacted staff for assistance to plan and host a meeting for the local farming community. On February 15, 2018 approximately 20 local food producers gathered for a potluck dinner at the Verona Lions Hall.

This group discussed a broad range of topics, including opportunities and challenges facing small scale agricultural operations in Frontenac. Several times, the conversations focused on the need for more opportunities to connect with and educate consumers about their food choices. Two events were discussed – a “Feast of Fields” style event and a farm tour / open house style event, known as “Open Farms”. It was suggested that bringing back Open Farms – an event that the National Farmers’ Union had coordinated for a few years around 2010 – would be a great initiative for rich consumer engagement and would require less human and financial resources to coordinate than Feast of Fields would require.

Given that Food and Beverage is one of the three themes in Frontenac County’s Economic Development Charter and that Local Food Awareness is part of the Rural Economic Development Program “Advancing Economic Development in the Frontenacs

through Collaboration”, Economic Development staff provided coordination and marketing support to the event.

Comment

Planning Process

In May, staff created a brief survey to gather feedback from the farming community about Open Farms in order to ensure early planning activities aligned with their vision for the event. Two participating farm operators agreed to assist with planning, and helped to guide the development of the event. Staff and these two operators met once in June and communicated via email throughout the summer.

During the month of July, staff worked with Jon Allison to develop the Open Farms brand identity and begin designing marketing materials.

Staff required operators to commit to participating in the event by the end of July, in order to allow enough lead time to create marketing materials. Receiving communication back from potential participants was a challenge during the planning period, and this part of the process moved slower than expected.

On August 7, all participating farm operators were invited to an evening meeting at the Sydenham Library. The group provided feedback on the design work presented, brainstormed marketing ideas, and ways they might address logistical challenges on their individual farms. Andrea Cumpson, of Sonset Farm, attended that meeting and was able to share many of the lessons she learned from participating in the original NFU Open Farm events. It was an important gathering to build consensus and excitement among participants. The notes from that meeting are attached to this report as Appendix A.

All participating operators were required to add Frontenac County as Additionally Insured on their insurance policy for the event date. They were also required to sign a Liability Waiver and Release Form, releasing the County from any liability associated with participating in the event. These administrative pieces were submitted throughout the month of August and again, this process moved slower than expected and required more staff time to attain than expected. Staff will undertake a review of similar events in Ontario to determine best practices from a liability perspective in order to streamline bureaucracy for participating farms and vendors.

From mid-August into early September, staff spent several days visiting all locations to deliver posters, flyers, and signage, to record videos, to secure paperwork, etc. The Communications Officer was critical in the development of the videos, and spent approximately three full days with the Community Development Officer visiting farm operators and an additional three days editing the videos. Visiting farm operators in person was quite labour intensive, but also seemed to be the most effective way to communicate with each of them.

The Community Development Officer was committed almost exclusively to the coordination of Open Farms for the three weeks leading up to the event.

Marketing Campaign

Staff undertook a comprehensive marketing campaign that included social media, paid media such as billboards and newspaper ads, and earned media (newspaper editorial). Feedback from Open Farms participants and visitors indicated that no single aspect of the marketing campaign specifically drove visitation, but the diversity of messaging across platforms and tactics was effective in reaching the right audience.

1. InFrontenac.ca/OpenFarms

Throughout the awareness campaign, all messaging directed people to www.inFrontenac.ca/OpenFarms for full details. The Open Farms web page highlighted the key details for the event, full list of street addresses, plus a link to the interactive web map and a link to a downloadable pdf map.

2. Interactive Web Map

Making use of the County's GIS capability, Economic Development staff created an [Interactive Web Map](#) to help web users navigate the event locations and learn the story of each farm. The analytics from the interactive web map (figure 5) tell an interesting story. The highpoints in the graph correlate with social media efforts to drive traffic to the map. Most notably, the peak on August 23 is related to the first video being posted on Facebook. The September 7 rise correlates to the posting of a checklist designed to help people make good decisions in preparing for the event. And the final peak of 178 visits to the web application on September 8 demonstrates that many people were consulting the map to plan their route.

3. Marketing efforts

- Earned media in the Frontenac News and the Kingston Whig Standard
- Paid ads in the Frontenac News including a double-page spread with map
- Two roadside “mini billboards” erected at the south ends of Harrowsmith and Inverary for a month leading up to the event
- Posters and flyers, posted and distributed by the participating operators to their retail partners, at farmers markets, and special events (see Appendix B for an example of the posters and flyers)
- Organic and paid social media reach (see Figures 1-5 at the end of this report for important analytics):
 - A [Facebook event](#) “co-hosted” by all participating farms and boosted to a geographically targeted audience in Kingston, Napanee, Gananoque, South, and Central Frontenac Townships.
 - [Short videos](#) about each location that offered a preview of the activities planned and a chance to “get to know” the farmer/owner. An additional

video, the “Blooper Reel”, gave online conversations a lighthearted tone and helped make viewers feel more connected to farmers before the event.

- [Instagram posts](#) that made use of many local food-related hashtags, tagged all participating farms and other accounts that would help to spread the message, like Visit Kingston and Regional Tourism Organization 9.
- Posts by the operators themselves across social platforms, encouraging their own networks to share the event with their friends.

Day of the Event

Seven locations – five farms and one retail outlet in South Frontenac Township, plus one farm just inside the City of Kingston – and about a dozen vendors participated in Open Farms in Frontenac on Sunday, September 9.

Of the seven locations, one estimated 200 guests visited them during the event, another estimated 300, one estimated 400, two estimated 500, and one estimated 600+ visitors over the course of the day. Operators attributed the high visitor numbers to the multiple touch-points of the effective marketing campaign.

During the course of the event, the Community Development Officer visited all seven locations and posted photos at each to social media. This regular social media activity gave people the feeling of being involved in the event, even if they were not able to participate. It also helped to showcase the event as a success, and position it in people’s minds as an attractive event to attend in future years.

Event Outcomes

All operators reported that their sales during the event were worth their time and effort invested in preparing their farms for visitors. They have all indicated they will participate again in the event next year.

In addition to sales, operators also found the event valuable as an opportunity to:

- Educate visitors on sustainable farm practices and local food choices
- Cultivate enthusiasm for local food through chats with visitors
- Allow children to experience animals up close (some for the first time!)
- Connect people with a local food source
- Create awareness for their farm/business
- Network and feel connected to a group
- Learn things about their own businesses

Looking forward

A debrief meeting is scheduled for Wednesday October 10, when the group will talk about successes and opportunities for improvement ahead of next year.

Due to the positive response from participating farms and event participants, staff anticipate that there will be an increased interest to continue the event in 2019. During the planning process, staff were in touch with many farms across Frontenac, and several indicated that they would participate if it weren't for conflicting plans on the event date. In fact, staff have already heard from a few additional farms that want to be involved next year.

The Community Development Officer committed approximately 123 hours to coordinating Open Farms, and this does not include the Communications Officer's time. Although it is anticipated that there will be more farms involved in 2019, a number of the tasks completed this year lay the foundation for an annual event (i.e., the development of an "Open Farms" logo, liability release and waiver forms) and will not need to be completed again next year. It is expected that the time investment will likely remain similar in 2019 to 2018.

Sustainability Implications

Open Farms in Frontenac provided local agricultural operators with an opportunity to connect in a meaningful way with many consumers in the region. The event had the potential to grow each operator's customer base and positively impact their long-term sales.

Generally, Open Farms increased awareness of small scale agriculture operations in Frontenac, improved consumer understanding of the local food system, and strengthened the region's identity as a source of high-quality locally produced food.

The County's role as coordinator created goodwill among the farming community. The participating operators expressed their appreciation for the County's support several times throughout this process.

Financial Implications

The funds for this project were budgeted as part of the "Advancing Rural Economic Development through Collaboration" program supported by the Rural Economic Development (RED) program, and are listed below. The 2019 budget has been estimated at \$4,000 to account for the costs associated with coordinating and marketing the event in 2018, and to allow some flexibility to take advantage of new opportunities.

Item	Cost	Source
Map in Frontenac News	\$1,500	Economic Development Marketing Budget
Printed Maps	\$100	Economic Development Marketing Budget
Billboards and Signage	\$1,000	Economic Development Marketing Budget
Design Costs	\$600	Economic Development Marketing Budget
Branded T-shirts	\$600	Economic Development Marketing Budget
Social Media Campaign	\$200	Economic Development Marketing Budget. In addition to staff time
Web Content Development and Interactive Map	\$0	Staff time
Coordination	\$0	Staff Time

Organizations, Departments and Individuals Consulted and/or Affected

Community Development Advisory Committee
 County Council & Staff
 South Frontenac Township Councillors and staff
 Frontenac County residents
 Kingston residents
 Local farms and businesses

Figure 1: Facebook - Event Reach

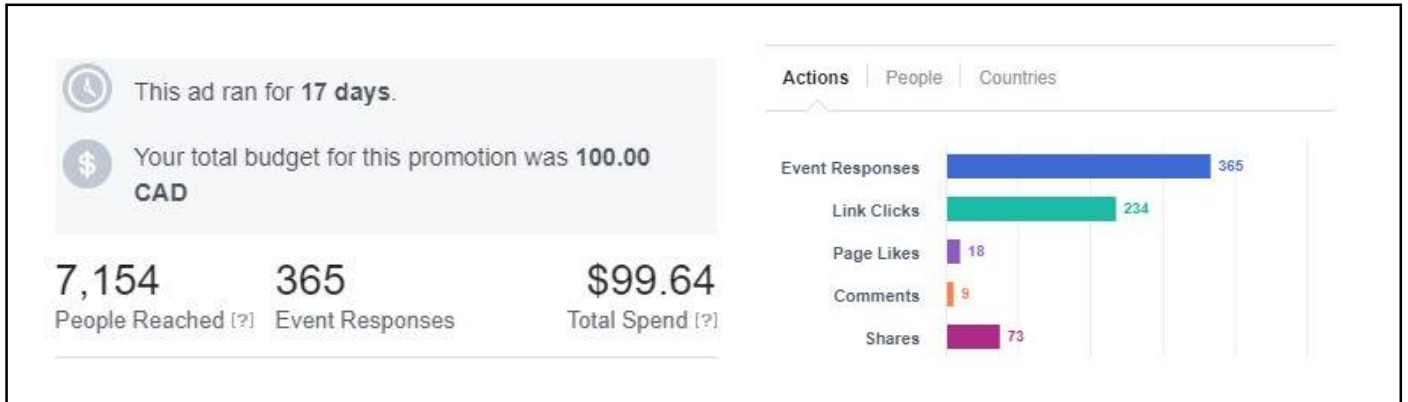


Figure 2: Facebook - Maple Ridge Farm Video Reach



Figure 3: Facebook – Post Reach
 “the number of people who had any posts from your page enter their screen”

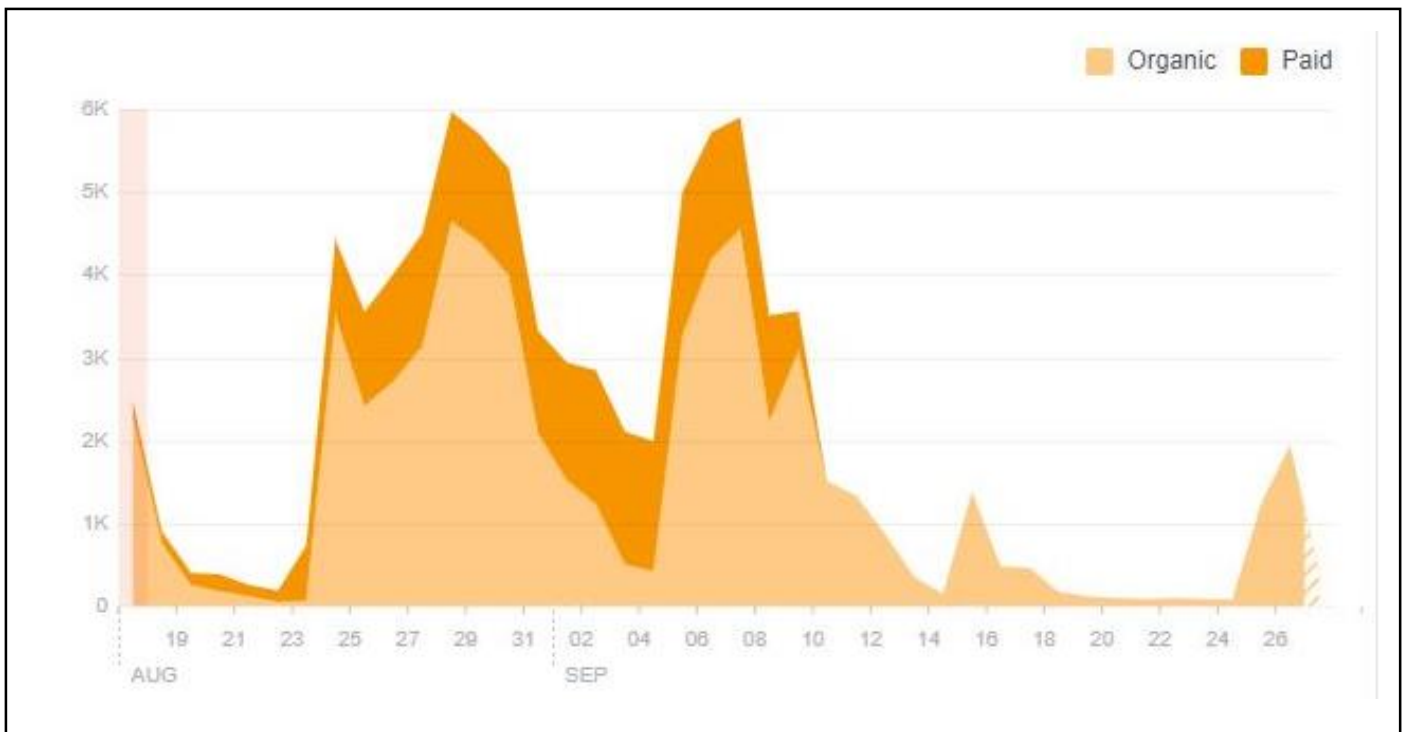


Figure 4: InFrontenac.ca – August 1 – September 10, all traffic, top pages

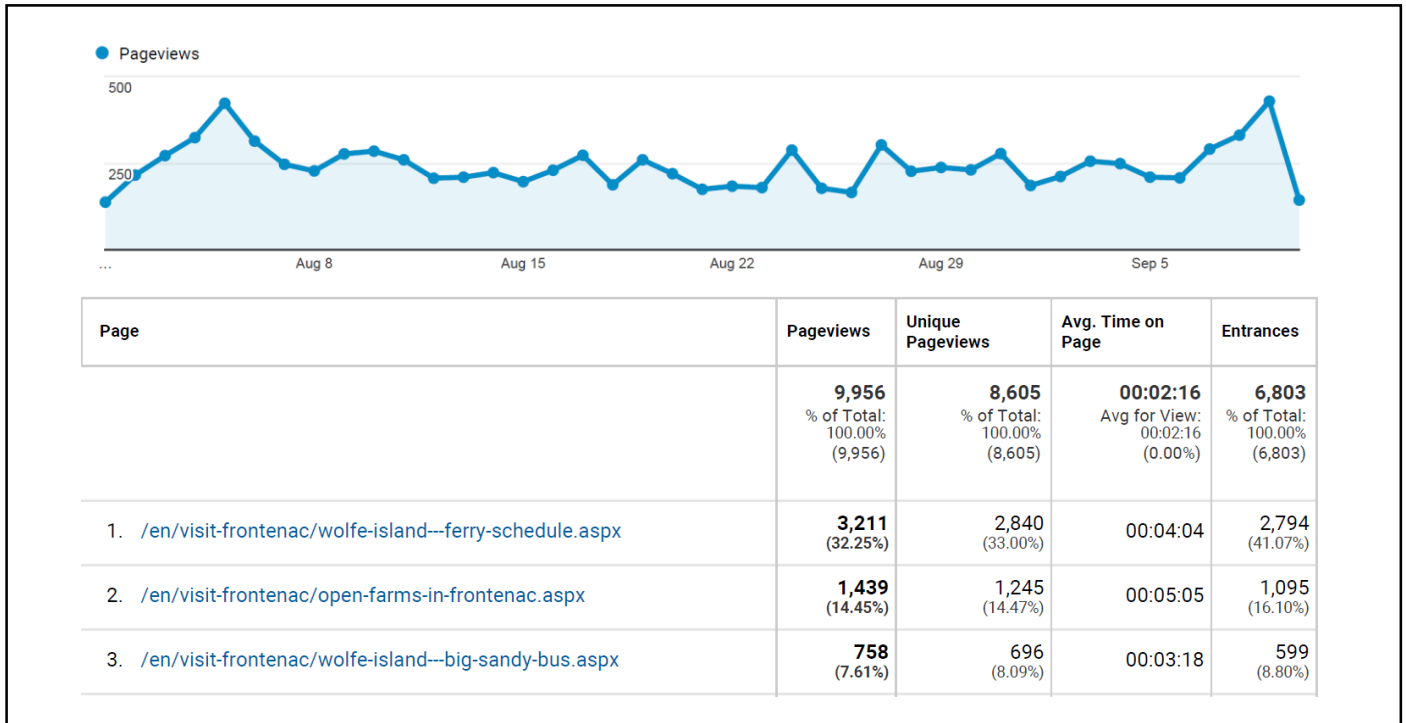


Figure 5: [Interactive Web Map](#) – August 11 to September 9





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OPEN FARMS IN FRONTENAC PARTICIPANT MEETING

Tuesday, August 7 | Sydenham Library

Why Open Farms: “Local Food” is one of the three priorities in Frontenac County’s 2015 Economic Development Charter. We hosted an informal gathering of about 20 local food producers in February 2018. During that meeting some farmers who had participated in Open Farms in past years suggested that it would be a great event to bring back to Frontenac. Since Frontenac County currently has resources allocated to the promotion of local food, it seemed a good fit that we would lead the coordination of the event.

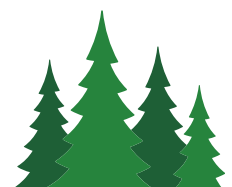
Goal of event: Connect food eaters with food producers to start mutually beneficial relationships. Increase awareness of farms in Frontenac.

Audience: Those who are interested in sourcing their food locally, who are willing to pay a fair price for locally and sustainably produced healthy foods. Those who are interested in better understanding what life on a working farm is like. Residents in Kingston, Frontenac, and the surrounding areas.

Each farm is different: This event is an opportunity for each farm to curate a unique visitor experience that reflect their values and offerings. For one farm, that might mean the focus is on educating young people about animal care, while another farm might focus more on getting people to start understanding the value of fresh produce. The activities at your farm and the vendors that you invite to participate on your property should all be part of a thoughtful experience designed to start meaningful relationships with your visitors.

Mitigating risk: By nature, the target market is unfamiliar with modern working farms. In addition to securing sufficient special event insurance, there are several things we can do to mitigate the risk that comes with welcoming the public to your private property:

- Marketing will include messaging to put people in the right mind-set from the start. Wording will be polished, but the general sentiment will be along the lines of... “Remember you’re being welcomed as a guest onto private property. Please respect the direction of farm owners, staff, and posted signs. Be aware of your surroundings at all times. These are working farms and, while measures have been taken to make them safe for your visit, you are expected to avoid careless behavior.”
- Each participating farm needs to recruit enough help to manage the flow of visitors. It is difficult to estimate how many visitors will go to each farm. As a starting point, it is suggested that each farm create a plan for their day, look at their farm in terms of “areas” and then plan to have at least one body stationed in each of those areas. Consider assigning more than one body in high-traffic / high-risk areas. Some



participants who have done similar events in the past mentioned they have had 10-20 vehicles in their parking areas at one time.

- Position someone as a “greeter” at the pedestrian entrance to the farm. Not only does this ensure people know where they should go first, it’s also an opportunity to address any of their questions / concerns at the beginning of their visit. It also helps create a nice first impression, setting the tone for the rest of their experience.
- Consider creating a “farm map” to hand out to visitors as they arrive – even a rough sketch of what’s happening where on your property can help visitors have an enjoyable and safe visit.
- At each farm, there should be sufficient and clear directional signage. Frontenac County will create and provide the following signs for each farm:
 - **Open Farms in Frontenac signs** (~32” x 24”) – one per farm to identify event locations
 - **“Slow Down” signs** (~24” x 16”) – two per farm, to be installed a few hundred meters down the road in both directions
 - **Parking signs** (~24” x 9”) – a few per farm (as required) to both direct vehicles toward parking and to indicate parking areas. Will have grommets to allow for a variety of installation methods.
 - **No Entry signs** (~24” x 9”) – a few per farm (as required) to keep visitors away from areas that are off-limits. Will have grommets to allow for a variety of installation methods.
 - **“Respect” signs** (~24” x 16”) – one per farm, for installation at pedestrian entry point to farm. The message will be polished, but will be along the lines of “Welcome to our farm. Remember, we are inviting you as a guest to our private property. Please respect the direction of our staff and posted signs for your own safety and the health and safety of the animals who live here. Be aware of your surroundings and don’t hesitate to ask questions if you are unsure.”

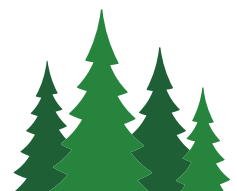
Porta-potties: The decision regarding on-site bathrooms (and costs associated with that decision) will be left up to each operator. Event marketing will include suggestions for bathroom and meal stops.

No dogs allowed: Everyone agreed that – aside from service animals – visitors will not be allowed to bring their own pets to participating farms (even if they are on a leash). This messaging will be included in event marketing.

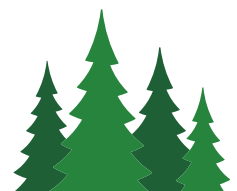
Farm-gate samples and sales: Frontenac County will investigate Public Health regulations regarding free samples and sales of food prepared by the farmer themselves (i.e., salads, baked goods). The rules may be different than those that would apply to guest vendors who set up a booth on a farm property.

Marketing: Frontenac County has developed a visual identity for Open Farms and will lead the advertising of the event, which will include the following initiatives:

- Online
 - InFrontenac.ca/Open Farms
 - Web Map – draft here: <http://arcg.is/1efSXS>
 - Will be included as one of September’s Frontenac Five
 - Will engage with Tourism Kingston and RTO 9 for distribution through their event listings
 - Will submit information to South Frontenac Township for posting on their website
 - Will be included in the August Ambassador email newsletter
- Social Media
 - Frontenac County will:



- Create a *Facebook Event* and ask all participants to become “co-hosts”
 - Post multiple times on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in the weeks and days prior to the event
 - Pay to boost posts geographically targeting Frontenac, Kingston, and the surrounding areas
 - Create and post multiple Facebook and Instagram stories
 - Create at least one post focused on each participant on each platform
 - Create a short video for each participant for use on social media and the web map
 - Post to all platforms throughout the day of the event
 - Explore the idea of engaging local food bloggers
 - Participating Farms are asked to:
 - Share Frontenac County posts on their own social media channels
 - Create their own posts for the event
 - Enthusiastically participate in the creation of short videos
 - Post to their social media channels on the day of the event
- Print
 - Media release
 - Frontenac County will create and distribute to regional media outlets
 - Frontenac News
 - Half page ad in August
 - Event spread / map week leading up to event
 - Posters
 - Will ask participants to help post in Frontenac and in Kingston, at partner retail locations (like Tara Natural Foods, the Grocery Basket, Glenburnie Grocery, etc), restaurants, and other high-traffic public areas like Queen's University and St. Lawrence College.
 - Flyers
 - For distribution at Farmers Markets
 - Bookmarks
 - To be sent home with elementary school children in the first week of school
- Radio
 - Paid radio advertising is not being considered
 - Extra effort will be made to get an on-air interviews on Country 93.5 and CBC Ontario Morning
- Signage
 - “Curbex” Signs x 2
 - To be installed in Harrowsmith where the K&P Trail meets Highway 38
 - To be installed at the south end of Inverary
 - Event Day signage will be installed at each farm approximately 10 days before the event
 - Additional directional signage will be installed for locations on side roads.



OPEN FARMS



Sunday, September 9
10am–4pm

Free Admission

Connect with our farmers,
their land, and your food.



Locations

Sonset Farm, Inverary

Birds & Bees Produce, Perth Village Road

Fat Chance Farmstead, Harrowsmith

Long Road Ecological Farm, Harrowsmith

Five Star Farm, Sydenham

Maple Ridge Farm, Sydenham

Food Less Travelled, Verona

Get Addresses: InFrontenac.ca/OpenFarms

Get all the info at InFrontenac.ca/OpenFarms