



Report 2019-079

Committee Information Report

To: Chair and Members of the Community Development Advisory Committee

From: Alison Vandervelde, Community Development Officer

Date of meeting: July 11, 2019

Re: **Community Development Advisory Committee – Open Farms 2019 Implementation Plan**

Recommendation

This report is for information only. It is intended to solicit advice from the Committee on the implementation of the Open Farms Event to be hosted on September 8, 2019.

Background

On September 9, 2018, Frontenac County staff coordinated the first County-sponsored “Open Farms” event that featured seven local family farms and supported a number of local vendors. The farms saw attendance of 200-600 people over the course of the day, and reported an increase to their overall customer base. [Report 2018-122: Open Farms in Frontenac 2018](#) outlines the history and success of the event and includes recommendations to continue the program.

Comment

Planning Process

Following Open Farms 2018, participants gathered for a debrief meeting on October 10, 2018. During that meeting, all participating farms involved agreed the event should become an annual tradition and they all agreed to participate in 2019.

In early 2019, County staff put the call out for additional farm locations and on March 28, an early planning meeting was held at the Sydenham library for any farms interested in participating. Representatives from 11 local farms, businesses, and organizations attended the meeting. At that meeting, it was agreed among stakeholders that marketing initiatives associated with the event should be undertaken earlier than the previous year and May 1 was set as the deadline for participating locations to register.

Ten locations will participate in the 2019 Open Farms event:

1. Maple Ridge Farm, Sydenham
2. Food Less Travelled, Verona
3. Long Road Ecological Farm, Harrowsmith
4. Five Star Farm, Scanlan Road
5. Frontenac County Plowing Match, Inverary
6. Sonset Farm, Inverary
7. Loughborough Heritage Orchard, Inverary
8. Fat Chance Farmstead, Kingston
9. Otter Creek Farm, Kingston
10. Sun Harvest Greenhouses, Kingston

Each farm location is planning special activities for Open Farms and managing the work to prepare their own locations. Frontenac County staff will coordinate event logistics and manage marketing activities.

Marketing Campaign

Two main target audiences have been identified for the 2019 Open Farms event.

Target Market 1: Hip Foodies

- 35 – 60 years old without children, or with adult children
- Primary audience is in Kingston, but may come from other nearby towns and cities: Napanee, Gananoque, Perth, Westport, Ottawa
- Access to greater disposable income
- Are knowledgeable about the value of locally produced goods, and are willing to pay more for them
- Concerned with the flavour of food and visual aesthetic appeal
- Interested in trying new things
- Want to be seen being connected to trendy food things

Target Market 2: Families with young children

- 30 – 45 years old with children under 10 years of age
- Primary audience is in the City of Kingston and South Frontenac Township
- Looking for a fun day out of the house
- Seeking opportunities to educate themselves and children about where food comes from
- Interested in opportunities to interact with animals, equipment, the land
- Interested in healthy food options for themselves and their children
- Often travel in multi-family groups

The following tools will be combined to create a robust marketing campaign for Open Farms:

1. Video

Frontenac County staff have visited each location to film short videos with the owners. This footage is being turned into a series of videos to grow awareness and build excitement around the Open Farms event. This will help visitors understand what they can expect at each location. In addition, videos created out of clips from different locations that focus on parts of the Open Farms experience catered to the interest of specific audiences. The video series will be released online over the course of July and August. This aspect of the marketing campaign was well received last year, and we expect it will once again contribute to increased views of Open Farms properties online.

2. Social Media

Staff have created an [Open Farms Facebook Event](#) and asked all participating locations to become co-hosts of this event. Early excitement has been created by posting “behind the scenes” photos of film shoots and by instructing participating locations to indicate their attendance and invite their friends to do the same.

Over the next two months, organic and paid posts will drive traffic to this event page and to the event webpage to increase awareness about the event. When creating a paid post, staff will ensure the material will be reach towards our ideal market audience, with the interests outlined above. This will strengthen the reach of the campaign to individuals and families who do not already follow Frontenac County on social media.

3. OpenFarms.ca

A few days ahead of last year’s event, there was a substantial spike in traffic to the event website www.inFrontenac.ca/OpenFarms. This year, marketing efforts will encourage people to plan further in advance, and the webpage will be populated with useful information, such as a list of what to expect at each farm, suggested routes linked to the audience’s specific interest, packing lists, etc. We have secured the URL OpenFarms.ca to further reinforce brand clarity and to improve ease of online access.

4. Roadside Signage

Curbex billboards will be rented and located along high traffic routes at Otter Creek Farm on Road 38 and Sun Harvest Greenhouses on Division Street. These signs will have compelling imagery and information such as the date, tagline, and website. Physical signs will help direct attention to the website and engage a local audience who could easily become returning customers for participating farms. The signage being placed on high traffic routes and on location, helps create a needed awareness of where people can start their Open Farms experience.

Staff are in discussions with the City of Kingston to secure locations for billboards during the month of August close to high-traffic areas near suburban neighbourhoods.

5. Print

For more traditional print media staff have organized an ad for the Open Farm event in Edible Ottawa magazine. This includes print content as well as digital content which will help gain traction with the magazines core audience, which is in line with our target audience of “Foodies”.

In addition, the Open Farm event was promoted in the first ever 2019 Frontenac Visitor Guide, which has been distributed within the Frontenac region and in surrounding regions. Once again, staff and participating farms will work together to circulate flyers in local businesses to help promote the event, by including the date, mission statement, participating farms with their location and website.

Farm to Table Stories with Visit Kingston and RTO 9

Frontenac County received partnership funding from Regional Tourism Organization 9 (RTO 9) to strengthen the farm-to-table culinary tourism product in the area. A writer has been hired to profile farms in Frontenac, including Open Farms locations, for the purpose of helping to inspire potential visitors in planning the locations they will attend this year. This written content will also be repackaged for farm-to-table itineraries that will be featured on www.visitkingston.ca later this year. These stories will be accented with professional photography and there is discussion around development of additional video work as well.

Open Farms on Wolfe Island

On April 16, Frontenac County staff met with members of the Wolfe Island agricultural community to discuss the possibility of island locations participating in Open Farms.

Ferry capacity was discussed as a major barrier to hosting this kind of event on the island, an issue that is exasperated by the vehicle-reliant nature of the event and the event date (Sunday, September 8), which falls during a time when the village and ferry are both still quite busy with seasonal activity.

The weekend itself is also a busy time for many farmers on Wolfe Island, especially given its close proximity to the annual Kingston Fall Fair. While there was obvious interest in being involved, simply expanding Open Farms to Wolfe Island is not feasible.

The stakeholders on Wolfe Island have expressed interest in the creation of a “Wolfe Island Farm-To-Table Tour” at a later date. This event would involve a bus tour of island farms and finish with a farm-to-table meal at a Marysville establishment. Details of this project can be found in Report 2019-082,

Strategic Priorities

At its June meeting, County Council approved [Frontenac County Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#).

Priority 1.2 - Refine and invest in efforts to accelerate economic development — to grow businesses, attract more visits and expand the tax base.

The County strategic plan identifies Open Farms as a priority initiative for staff to continue development of. Open Farms in Frontenac provides 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. In addition, the Open Farms event serves to highlight our region as a great place for farm-to-table agriculture, and can help attract new, young farming families to Frontenac County.

Financial Implications

The funds for this project were included in the 2019 operating budget.

Organizations, Departments and Individuals Consulted and/or Affected

Community Development Advisory Committee
County Council & Staff
South Frontenac Township Council
South Frontenac Development Services Department
KFLA Public Health
Kingston Accommodation Partners
Frontenac County residents
Kingston residents
Local farms and businesses