

Highlander news

Food promoted as part of a healthy economy

By Lisa Gervais

As she sat with a break-out group at the Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum in Minden last week, Heather Bramham of Esson Creek Maple talked about their experience with local food production.

“So, we’re making this syrup and now what?” she asked her group. They were discussing some of the challenges of selling and branding local food. She went on to ask for help with the “what to do, when to do it and how to do it” of getting their product from tree to table.

About 85 people attended the all-day forum at the Minden Hills Community Centre according to Harvest Haliburton’s Rosie Kadwell, the organization that hosted the event.

It offered participants an opportunity to learn about food and agriculture-related projects underway in the county and have a voice in shaping the future of the local food sector.

There were municipal planners and councillors, people in economic development, food producers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs, food tourism operators and promoters, environmentalists, and consumers.

The day started with “bite-sized” presentations from locals involved in the industry; keynote speeches from OMAFRA’s Heather Chandler and Stephen Duff; a local lunch and the afternoon break-out sessions.

They were on selling and branding local food; culinary and food tourism; municipal food planning, agricultural economic development officer/committee and the



A scribe takes notes as a break-out group talks at last week’s Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum in Minden.
Photo by Lisa Gervais.

needs of our community and other burning topics, later identified as food security and climate change.

County of Haliburton director of tourism Amanda Virtanen facilitated the culinary and food tourism group.

She discussed the growth of the industry locally, from craft breweries, to people going to farm gates, restaurants and hotels serving local food, places such as Abbey Gardens and experience providers such as Yours Outdoors incorporating food. She noted the industry doesn’t cater to tourists

only here, but locals as well.

Her group said one of the challenges is getting the word out about what is available.

At the agricultural economic development officer/committee and the needs of our community table, there was talk of seasonal challenges and onerous government regulations.

During a break in the day, Kadwell told *The Highlander*, “Our community is blossoming with local food, and everybody’s talking about local economy,

and so wanted to bring the two together ... and see what we can do.”

From the break-out groups, she said the goal was an action plan and then “we’re going to write a report and that report will help to drive food and agricultural and economic development forward for all the key stakeholders.”

Kadwell added it’s more than just food tourism. She said it’s about creating a greater income for farm families and ensuring a living wage so people can afford to buy locally-produced food.