

Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum: Advancing the Capacity of Haliburton County's Food Sector



May 2019

A report on the outcomes of the Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum, prepared for Harvest Haliburton by Melissa Johnston MA, through the generosity of the Haliburton County Development Corporation.

All event photos were generously provided by Stephen Dow.



Together Creating a
Sustainable Food System
for our Community



Executive Summary

On May 5th, 2019, Harvest Haliburton hosted a Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum. The event was designed to bring together community stakeholders from all corners of the food sector to discuss the local food system and identify strategies to help it thrive. Participants learned about existing food- and agriculture-based businesses, organizations, and initiatives and they discussed how to expand, support, and advance the local food system. Through the development of an action plan, Forum attendees articulated their priorities for how they would like to see Haliburton County's food and agriculture sector flourish.

This report provides an overview of the day's agenda, providing details on the various featured presentations, the locally-sourced lunch, the afternoon discussion sessions, and the feedback received following the event.

For readers who wish to focus solely on the action plan aspect of the report, a condensed report is available, which includes only the sections of this report that outline opportunities and action steps.

1. Introduction

Harvest Haliburton (HH) was formed in 2008, under the name of the Haliburton Highlands Local Food Coalition. This was a grassroots committee dedicated to raising awareness about the local food movement. In 2011, the committee began operating as part of the Haliburton County Community Cooperative, with the mandate to support the creation of a sustainable food system for Haliburton County.

A sustainable community food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a community. HH realizes a sustainable food system can only be achieved by working in partnership and engaging key stakeholders, hence working collaboratively is a high priority for the organization.

HH is working to create a positive, collaborative environment for local food in a community that does not have a single acre of prime agricultural land, and a sector that has often faced obstacles and fragmentation.

Over the last several years, Haliburton County has seen some exciting and innovative developments in its local food system. The potential for expanding local food production is evidenced by the hugely successful farmers' markets, our County's culinary tourism strategy, the shift toward supportive land use language around food and agriculture in municipal official plans, and consumer demand for food grown and produced close to home. The appetite for even greater access to local food is unmistakable, but the best way to take advantage of this growing interest has been less clear.

2. The Food Forum

In an effort to move Haliburton County's local food system forward, Harvest Haliburton began planning an event that would bring together stakeholders from all areas of the food and agriculture sector, including producers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs, as well as local economic development experts and decision-makers. This event, entitled Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum, took place on March 5th, 2019 and featured 19 presenters, 6 facilitators and approximately 75 participants.

The event was designed with several broad goals in mind: to facilitate interactive learning and information-sharing regarding past food and agriculture research, to highlight current capacity-building projects, and to the strengthen the potential for future action steps.

The idea was to provide the opportunity for those working in diverse segments of the food system to learn about each other's work and goals, as well as to glean from these stakeholders a solid plan for continued collaboration to help realize those goals.

3. Who Attended?

The Forum was very well-attended and brought together a variety of stakeholders from the food, agriculture and economic development sectors. The attendees included primary producers, politicians, economic development officers, municipal staff and policy-makers, educators, researchers, retailers, market vendors, restaurateurs, concerned citizens, and students.

Many of the attendees represented organizations that had also provided monetary, or in-kind support for the event. The logos of these supporting organizations are shown here.



4. The Morning Agenda

Opening remarks were provided by our Master of Ceremonies, Andrew von Zuben, who emphasized the importance of a positive, solution-based approach to discussing the County's food system and where it's headed. This was a crucial tone to set as food system advancements can often be derailed by a disproportionate focus on obstacles and past failings.

The first half of the morning provided attendees with a variety of presentations about what is already happening in the community around local food production, processing, marketing, and consumption. These 'Ignite' Presentations also touched on food tourism; food literacy; current research projects; educational opportunities; and policy, planning, and economic development. The presentations provided a taste of the impressive number of people and initiatives driving the local food system forward in Haliburton County. Presenters and their topics are listed below, along with links to their associated organizations:

- Food Tourism – Amanda Virtanen, Director of Haliburton County Tourism
 - www.myhaliburtonhighlands.com

- Local Food First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) – Mike Rutter, CAO/County Clerk for County of Haliburton
 - www.thecounty.ca/county-government/municipal-projects/fice/
 - <https://onregionalecdev.com/2019/04/04/a-popular-first-impressions-community-exchange-is-now-available-for-local-food/>
- Cook It Up – Gena Robertson, Executive Director of SIRCH
 - www.sirch.on.ca/training/cook-it-up/
- Harvest Haliburton – Rosie Kadwell, Chair Harvest Haliburton
 - www.harvesthaliburton.com
- Rhubarb Restaurant – Lila Sweet, Employee of Rhubarb
 - www.rhubarbhaliburton.com
- Haliburton County Farmers’ Market – Faye Adamson, Market Manager
 - www.hcfma.ca
- Haliburton County Farmers’ Association – Shane Dykstra – Vice-President of HCFA
 - www.haliburtoncountymunicipalfarmersassociation.com
- Haliburton County Garlic Growers Association – Deb Barnhart, Chair of HCGGA
 - www.haliburtongarlic.ca
- Graham’s Farm Market – Andrew Graham, Owner and Operator
 - www.facebook.com/grahamsfarmMinden/
- Abbey Gardens – Heather Reid, Operations Director
 - www.abbeygardens.ca
- Killara Station – Randy MacDonald, Owner and Operator
 - www.killarastation.com
- Agriculture Report for Haliburton County – Kate Hall, Research Consultant
 - www.harvesthaliburton.com/uploads/1/3/8/9/13895416/food_and_agriculture_in_haliburton_county_web.pdf
- Haliburton County Development Corporation – Autumn Wilson, Program & Operations Coordinator
 - www.haliburtoncdc.ca
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
 - Catherine Oosterbaan, Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor
 - Jocelyn Beatty, Rural Planner
 - www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/index.html

- Ontario Federation of Agriculture – Danielle Collins, Policy Analyst
 - www.ofa.on.ca
- U-Links Community Based Research – Larry Clarke, Co-Chair
 - www.ulinks.ca

The Ignite Presentations were captured on video by Kim Curran through the generosity of the HKPR Health Unit. Links to videos of each presenter can be found on the Harvest Haliburton website: www.harvesthaliburton.com/food-and-agriculture-economic-development-forum-2019.html

The Ignite session was followed by two keynote presentations by OMAFRA’s chief economist Steve Duff and Haliburton County’s former Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor, Heather Candler. Steve’s talk provided a detailed look at the economic reality and opportunities for Haliburton County’s food sector and provided context by outlining Ontario’s agricultural profile. By cross-referencing data on Haliburton County’s demographics and tourist behaviour, and OMAFRA’s statistics on food supply and demand in this region, Steve was able to demonstrate a number of specific opportunities for increasing local food production and consumption and fostering economic development.

Heather’s presentation was an in-depth look at OMAFRA’s Agricultural Economic Development Resource Guide, providing best practices for developing a profitable and sustainable agri-food system according to the specific characteristics of the region. She underscored the need for all community members to work together to build a resilient food system, be they promoters, connectors, educators, enablers or organizers. This approach does away with the notion that a food system is just producers and consumers. Instead, it emphasizes that we all have a role to play in creating the food system that works for our communities. Heather then provided a step-by-step process for moving the needle on local food system development.



Both of the keynote slide presentations can be found on the Harvest Haliburton website: www.harvesthaliburton.com/food-and-agriculture-economic-development-forum-2019.html

OMAFRA's Agriculture Economic Development Resource Guide can be downloaded here: www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/aed.pdf

5. Local Lunch and Learning Opportunity

The lunch served following the presentations was catered by the Cook It Up program offered through SIRCH, and featured approximately 90% locally-sourced ingredients. Cook It Up is a program that provides unemployed and underemployed residents of Haliburton County with training, experience, and certification in the food service industry.



The lunch provided the trainees with an excellent learning opportunity not just in catering an event with almost 75 mouths to feed, but also in addressing the challenge of sourcing and transporting local food around the region in the off-season.

The difficulty that HH and SIRCH faced in locating and contacting local food producers, and then arranging pick-up or delivery in an efficient manner, revealed a number of the logistical challenges facing institutional food providers like caterers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, etc. Because the County lacks a centralized information hub for determining which locally produced foods are available and in what quantities, food providers generally opt for the convenience of sourcing from large commercial distributors, which tend to prioritize price and efficiency over local sourcing and sustainability.

In order to provide a 90% locally-sourced lunch, HH members compiled a list of producers that we knew would have product available in time for the event. These items were then ordered and, in many cases, delivered by HH members themselves. The relative inefficiency and unsustainability of this approach served to spotlight some of the logistical barriers to increasing local food consumption in the County.

6. The Breakout Sessions

The afternoon agenda provided attendees the opportunity to participate in targeted discussions on a variety of topics. Participants split into five groups and considered these topics according to their associated challenges, the opportunities they call to mind, and the prioritized goals and action steps that participants identified.

The selected topics focused on several broad aspects of food, agriculture and economic development. The topics included:

1. Selling and Branding Local Food

This topic, facilitated by Catherine Oosterbaan, Agriculture and Rural Economic Advisor with OMAFRA, was of particular interest to food business operators and entrepreneurs. The discussion touched on:

- Existing local resources for food entrepreneurs and how to expand or add to these to make them more accessible and relevant to the local context
- Barriers to small-scale food businesses and how to address these
- Demand for local food and how to promote and encourage local food consumption
- Possible workshops and training sessions that local food businesses need in order to effectively market their products (e.g. OMAFRA's Selling Food in Ontario workshops)

2. *Culinary and Food Tourism*

This topic was facilitated by Amanda Virtanen, Director of Tourism for Haliburton County. Food tourism is of particular importance in Haliburton County as the development of a robust Food Tourism strategy has been underway for several years and is recently picking up steam. Tourism is already a vital feature of the local economy, and opportunities abound for integrating local food into the Haliburton County visitor experience. Forum attendees who joined this group discussed:

- How existing tourism enterprises can highlight local food more effectively
- The unique flavours of Haliburton County and how to tell a compelling local food story
- Resource shortages and product gaps that challenge the food tourism potential of the County (e.g., is there a need for a local food directory?)

3. *Municipal Food Planning*

This group, facilitated by Jocelyn Beatty, Rural Planner with OMAFRA, drew on the findings of *Food and the Official Plan*, the Community Food Assessment report, which identified some of the challenges facing Haliburton County with regard to local food production and consumption. Some of the issues explored included:

- The effects of land use policies on local food production and consumption such as support for community gardens and farmers' markets
- The effects of zoning bylaws on local food production and consumption, such as restrictive uses in various zones and minimum lot sizes and their effects on small-scale agriculture
- Opportunities for local policy reform that would facilitate the development of our regional food system

4. Agricultural Economic Development Officer/Committee and the Needs of the Community

Haliburton County does not currently have an Agricultural Economic Development Officer or Agricultural Advisory Committee. However, the County does have Harvest Haliburton, Haliburton County Farmers' Association and our OMAFRA Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor, Catherine Oosterbaan, with whom we meet on a monthly basis. This discussion group had the opportunity to speak with our former OMAFRA Advisor, Heather Candler. The suggested discussion topics included:

- The pros and cons of instating an Agricultural Economic Development Officer in the County
- The pros and cons of having an Agricultural Advisory Committee in the County
- How to implement a solution that would advance economic opportunities in food and agriculture
- Next steps for how Haliburton County can best make use of OMAFRA's Agriculture Economic Development Resource Guide

7. Outcomes of the Breakout Group Discussions

This section will examine the results of the group discussions that took place over the course of the afternoon. The assets, opportunities, and challenges outlined by each group are compiled and considered under a number of categories. The prioritized goals and action steps are then outlined in turn.



8. Haliburton County Community Assets and Opportunities

Haliburton County is not generally considered a food destination or a region of prime agricultural production. However, it is home to an impressive number of individuals organizations, initiatives, businesses, events, and collaborative partnerships that focus

their efforts on developing and protecting a vibrant local food system. While a full asset mapping and assessment has yet to be completed for the region, the list below provides a snapshot of some of the County's many food resources.

8.1 Haliburton County's Food Assets:

- numerous primary producers offering a variety of products including meat, eggs, dairy, vegetables, honey and maple syrup, herbs and flowers, wild edibles, and much more
- a wealth of businesses and restaurants promoting and selling local food
- several tour operators and experiential tourism services that incorporate food into their offerings
- a vibrant farmers' market that operates on three days a week in three different corners of the County – the farmers' market features a variety of local food vendors and provides seasonal access to more locally produced food than any other food retail outlet in the County
- the Haliburton County Community Co-op supports a number of organizations and entrepreneurial initiatives, all of which contribute to the vibrancy of the County, drawing visitors and enriching the lives of local residents – Harvest Haliburton is a project of the HCCC and through this partnership, HH is able to bring local food system sustainability to the forefront
- SIRCH (Supportive Initiative for Residents in the County of Haliburton) whose mandate is to create a resilient community, reduce poverty and foster connections – SIRCH has several food-based initiatives to help increase local food security
- a wide variety of food-centric events and festivals that take place throughout the year, including the Garlic Festival, Maple-Fest, the Apple Sauce Project, Abbey Gardens' Seasonal Festivals, the annual Big Picnic, and more
- the County has more than 20 regularly inspected commercial kitchens available for use by food business operators and entrepreneurs
- the Haliburton County Development Corporation (HCDC) is a valuable resource for food business owners needing business support resources or funding
- the political leaders in Haliburton County are becoming increasingly engaged and supportive of food-based projects and initiatives, including a willingness to consider how policy and planning processes can be made more conducive to local food production, distribution, and access
- several community gardens exist throughout the County, providing experiential opportunities to those interested in micro-scale food production
- Haliburton County's greatest asset is its community of highly engaged people who are willing to collaborate and advocate for local food system development

8.2 Local Food System Opportunities

The opportunities that exist in the County are nearly limitless. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but it represents some of the blue-sky thinking that resulted from the

Breakout Sessions at the Forum. From this list, the prioritized goals were identified and will be outlined in detail in sections 10 and 11 below.

- *Branding:*
Haliburton County has the opportunity to develop and enhance the branding around the taste of the region. Because the area is already known for its tourist attractions and outdoor adventure experiences, adding food to the mix is a natural fit. Branding would include highlighting and showcasing the crops and products that are particularly successful in HC, including garlic, maple syrup, tomatoes, wild leeks, dairy, meat, etc. Branding also means collecting and promoting the food narratives that connect people and place to the food being offered and eaten.
- *Policy Change:*
New developments in food production, distribution, and consumption are leading political leaders to reconsider how outdated policies may be hindering the capacity for local food systems to thrive. Because people are increasingly interested in small- and micro-scale food production, on marginal or urban land, and using terms like “homestead” and “market garden” as opposed to “farm”, the language around food in our official plans needs to adjust accordingly. Haliburton County’s decision-makers are particularly open to working with food groups to facilitate greater local food production and access. This means that the time is right to encourage policy review and changes to bylaws that have previously created unnecessary barriers to food production.
- *Infrastructure:*
In order to build community capacity around local food production and availability, Haliburton County could use some new infrastructure. There is great interest in installing a centralized, shared cold storage facility, as temperature control is a significant component in any food business that uses fresh, perishable ingredients or value-added products that require refrigeration or freezing. While there is ample space in the community for food processing in commercial kitchens, the limiting factor on quantity is often the lack of suitable temperature-controlled storage space. Other infrastructure components that could greatly benefit the community’s access to local food include an egg-grading station and a local or mobile abattoir.
- *Education and Research:*
New opportunities to expand education and research on the topics of agriculture and food system sustainability abound in Haliburton County. However, a foundation of prior research already exists. One goal of the Forum was to ensure that community members are aware of the work that has been done so that subsequent research can build upon what is already known. Prior research has explored topics such as food access, production and consumption patterns and gaps, the impacts of policy and planning on local food production, culinary tourism opportunities and barriers, pest control in garlic production, mobile abattoirs and backyard hens, and local food infrastructure status and opportunities. Possible future research topics articulated in

the breakout sessions included exploration of zoning bylaws that hinder small-scale food production, comprehensive asset mapping and assessment, research into alternative and progressive agricultural practices suitable for the region, and creation of a land inventory to assess agricultural potential. Forum attendees also highlighted opportunities for school programs to incorporate agriculture, food tourism, processing, and preparation into their curricula and co-ops. As well, some community members would like to see a learning centre dedicated to food and agriculture, which could include a library of resource material and local research.

- *Awareness Raising:*

The issues of agriculture and food system sustainability are in constant flux and require ongoing awareness-raising efforts to ensure that community members understand the role they play. Based on the discussions during the breakout session, there is significant interest in developing ongoing access to information on this topic. This could include creating a permanent position for a coordinator and event planner whose role would be to facilitate the promotion and execution of events and initiatives around local food in the County. It could also include the creation of an agricultural advisory committee through which farmers and food business operators could voice their concerns and stay abreast of policies and developments that impact their livelihoods. Harvest Haliburton has taken on some of this work already, and could consider how their advisory role might be solidified going forward. As well, there is ample evidence that Haliburton County would benefit from a user-friendly online food information map or hub. This would allow residents and visitors to easily locate and access locally produced food at the farm gate, in restaurants and retail outlets, or at events and tourist experiences that feature local foods.

- *Niche Markets:*

Because Haliburton County is not generally considered an agricultural region, there are opportunities to emphasize the niche products and markets that do thrive in this area. Products like garlic, maple syrup and wild edibles already enjoy the limelight, and there are many other niche markets that could be explored. One such market that has recently introduced its potential is marijuana tourism. The market for cannabis infused edibles is exploding, and Haliburton County may consider getting in on the ground floor.

- *Progressive Production Practices:*

With climate change on the minds of many who work on or with the land, the time is right to consider how Haliburton County can contribute to climate justice. Food production in non-agricultural regions is often innovative and progressive by necessity. Producers in the County have the opportunity to explore alternative farming practices that mitigate climate change, increase their productivity, and amplify the narrative around food system sustainability. One such alternative practice that was highlighted during the breakout session was aquaponics. This type of food production combines the raising of aquatic animals with plant production in a closed system whereby the aquatic waste provides nutrients for the plants.

This, and other types of agroecological farming are worth exploring as Haliburton County further develops the sustainability of its food system.

- *Relationships:*
Haliburton County should take advantage of every opportunity to build relationships between food producers and eaters. Research on farmers' market customers, shows that they value these retail outlets as much for the opportunities to interact with local farmers and ask questions about their food, as for access to the food itself. Any opportunity to bridge the gap between producers and consumers is a great way to cement these relationships and strengthen the food system. As well, seeking out more opportunities for collaboration and partnership between food-related stakeholders and organizations will help to build the community capacity to make meaningful change and improvements to the food system. Exploring the potential for land "match-making" between land-owners and prospective new farmers is another relationship-building opportunity to consider.
- *Events/Initiatives:*
There are limitless opportunities for the County to expand existing annual and seasonal events, and develop new food experiences and initiatives. There is already significant enthusiasm around the annual Garlic and Maple Festivals and there are opportunities to expand the promotional reach and programming of these events. Prior to the Garlic Festival, local restaurants could help cross-promote by including and showcasing local garlic dishes on their menus. Maple-Fest could expand beyond Wilberforce and become a County-wide event with maple tastings and restaurant partnerships as well. Other suggested events and activities that arose during the breakout session include:
 - farm tours culminating in community meals featuring the farms' products
 - food demonstrations at the farmers' markets
 - more artisanal food-making events (e.g. cheese, sausages, bread) featuring local ingredients
 - an annual (or seasonal) community meal to help raise awareness about food issues
 - expand the annual applesauce project (applesauce made from surplus apples on public and private land and distributed by SIRCH and Meals on Wheels) into a festival celebrating food security and food literacy initiatives
 - put a new spin on familiar ingredients (e.g. a tomato-tasting event, featuring local tomatoes)
 - research highly successful food events in other communities (e.g. Winterlicious and Summerlicious in Toronto, the Cranberry Festival in Bala) and determine how they can be adapted to Haliburton County

9. Challenges

The food system challenges listed during the breakout sessions fell into a number of broad categories: 1) county-specific challenges, 2) regulatory challenges, 3) food

system-related challenges, and 4) larger global issues. It is useful to understand the limitations and barriers that the community perceives as hindering development and improvement of the local food system in order to create an effective action plan. These challenges are listed below:

1) *Challenges that are specific to Haliburton County:*

- a. the size and spread of the community (making coordination of services and distribution/access to local food more difficult)
- b. short growing season
- c. lack of food storage facilities (especially cold/freezer storage)
- d. lack of local food distribution options
- e. lack of communication between producers and other food businesses and tourism operators
- f. lack of communication between producers and consumers
- g. difficulty coordinating quantities and timing of food production for industry/institutional use (e.g. restaurants, schools, caterers, hospitals, etc.)
- h. visitor perceptions that Haliburton County lacks local food and high-quality chefs/restaurants
- i. seasonal population that makes employment, availability, and access difficult in the shoulder- and off-seasons (i.e. restaurants and accommodations close for the season, temporary labour-force)
- j. lack of public transportation options
- k. lack of coordination between events and activities during the high season
- l. inaccurate agricultural statistics that don't represent the truth on the ground
- m. municipalities and levels of government are often on different 'pages'
- n. food sector stakeholders often working within 'silos' and failing to communicate with each other

2) Regulatory barriers to the local food system:

- a. lack of local egg-grading station
- b. quota system tends to favour larger-scale operations
- c. certified kitchen renovations can be prohibitively expensive
- d. closest abattoir is 75km away
- e. small-scale and alternative models of food production can often be hindered by language in official plans and bylaws (e.g. zoning, minimum farm size, minimum building size, etc.)
- f. permitted land uses often prohibit food production on marginal land or in areas not considered farmland

3) Food system-related challenges:

- a. food insecurity (13.5% of households in the County are food insecure)
- b. high cost of local food (locally-produced food is usually priced according to the true cost of food production, which is higher than grocery store prices)
- c. GMOs, pesticides and other health and environmental concerns that accompany our current industrialized food system

- d. the globalized food system, heavily geared toward efficiency, quantity over quality, and convenience, makes it difficult for local food systems to flourish
- 4) Larger global issues:
- a. persistent poverty
 - b. climate change
 - c. environmental degradation

10. Action Plan

The intended outcome from the Forum was to develop a prioritized action plan and series of goals, based on the assets, opportunities and challenges discussed in the breakout sessions. These would take into consideration the feasibility, timing, and necessary steps to carry out the goals, the resources required, and the stakeholders who should be involved or, in some cases, take the lead on moving these goals forward. Due to the breadth of the topics and the limited time in which to discuss them, many of the groups did not have the chance to move beyond listing the goals.

The goals align directly with the opportunities outlined above (section 8.2) and are listed below in association with each group title and topic, along with any relevant stakeholders whose involvement is deemed essential.

Breakout Group #1 – Selling and Branding Local Food

Goal: Create the brand for local food in Haliburton County

- develop a strong social media presence
- a cohesive campaign to promote the Taste of Haliburton County

Goal: Explore co-operative distribution models

- determine the distribution needs within the County
- connect all aspects of the food sector and its activities (events, meet-ups, education, etc.)

Goal: Create an online food hub or similar tool

- to help educate the public and connect them with food producers/entrepreneurs
- to make it easy to find local food anywhere in the County
- to help disseminate important information (e.g. regulatory updates, agricultural resources, economic development initiatives, etc.)

Goal: Explore the feasibility of complimentary infrastructure

- egg-grading station
- mobile abattoir

Stakeholders listed: an Agricultural Economic Development Officer, the Farmers' Association.

Breakout Group #2 – Food Tourism

Goal: Build awareness of food tourism assets

- familiarization tours
- expand promotional efforts
- find opportunities to develop food tourism story-telling
- create the conclusive guide to County Food
- secure long-term funding for a County food coordinator

Goal: Incorporate and enhance the role of food and agriculture in existing and new events, festivals and experiences in the County

- look to successful local and provincial events and experiences (e.g. Cranberry Fest, Summerlicious, Winterlicious) for inspiration
- upgrade festival infrastructure (i.e. hydro, shelters, etc.)
- find opportunities to collaborate between existing groups and events (e.g. have farmers' market vendors participate in more events)

Stakeholders listed: the Culinary Tourism Taskforce, Gena Robertson at SIRCH.

The resources and assets listed to help move the above goals forward included: local media, tourism stakeholders, Chamber of Commerce, BIA, Algonquin Gateway Business Association and service clubs.

Breakout Group #3 – Municipal Planning and Policy

Goal: Review and address zoning and land use bylaws that affect local food production

- invite broad public participation in reviewing bylaws
- consider new definitions of permitted land use (e.g. homesteader, market gardener, etc.)
- Harvest Haliburton to conduct a comprehensive review of bylaws
- develop proactive zoning bylaws to enable agricultural infrastructure (i.e. processing, building, etc.)
- follow up with planners after their regular meetings

Goal: Develop a land inventory for the County

- using Municipal Property Assessment Corporation data as a baseline, develop an accurate map of the productive land in the County

Goal: Create an Agricultural Advisory Committee

- decide what this looks like (i.e. municipal or county level?)
- develop a Terms of Reference and mission statement

Stakeholders listed: the Farmers' Association, Harvest Haliburton, Food Tourism representatives, municipal planners, Environment Haliburton, U-Links, the Land Between, Trent University.

Breakout Group #4 – Agricultural Economic Development Committee or Officer

Goal: Foster the continued viability of food and agriculture in the County

- educate the public about local food issues and opportunities whenever possible at community events
- develop a comprehensive asset inventory

Goal: Promote sustainability from field to table

- provide education around soil health and best practices
- promote more green initiatives around food
- consider a County-wide currency for local spending

Goal: Prioritize quality of life and fairness

- prioritize a living wage for all those working in the food sector

Goal: Normalize local agriculture through communication

- tell the County's good-news food stories
- connect food producers to consumers and to a variety of retail outlets

Goal: Enhance community engagement

- develop a 'Buy Close By' initiative
- put local food on the radars of more community groups

The above group did not list any stakeholders during their discussion, but these actions could involve our local OMAFRA representative, members of the Farmers' Association, and local economic development officers.

Breakout Group #5 – Wild Card Topic (Climate Change and Food Security)

This group's topic was determined by Forum attendees themselves by gathering ideas about which issues they felt were important but not covered by the above four breakout groups. This group discussed the issues of climate change and food security as they pertain to Haliburton County's food system.

Goal: Reinforce progressive and conscious agriculture

- hold seasonal (3-4 times per year) community meals
- bring people together to celebrate food and its close ties to the land and the environment

Stakeholders listed: municipal food and agriculture advisory committees, Harvest Haliburton, one person working at the County level with economic development representatives from each of the municipalities.

11. Summary of the Action Plan

The intention of the Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum was to organize the above goals into an action plan that could be put into motion following the event. The first step in this process will be to gather some of the key stakeholders in the community who are equipped to implement the next steps outlined in this report. With the generous support of the Haliburton County Development Corporation, Harvest Haliburton will be organizing and conducting a roundtable discussion with these stakeholders and will work with the actions and opportunities laid out above. Based on

the prioritized goals listed above, the following six projects and initiatives should be discussed and assessed for feasibility:

1) *Develop the Taste of Haliburton County brand*

This will include identifying the primary elements of HC's food system (i.e. crops, products, experiences, and businesses) and developing the tools to promote these assets. The discussion should cover:

- expanding the presence of food at existing events and festivals
- creating a "Buy Close By" mentality across the County
- gathering food-related good-news stories to promote,
- creating a consistent image around food in the region, through collaboration and greater communication among stakeholders

2) *Develop an information hub for local food and related resources*

This should allow the resident and visitor populations to easily find and access locally produced food in a number of different outlets (retail, restaurant, farm-gate, events, accommodations, etc.). This could include:

- a dedicated online food mapping tool that is well promoted and widely used
- an information hub that lists food-related resources and events
- a land inventory to help recruit new producers to the region or expand the opportunities for local producers looking for more growing space

3) *Review and adjust policies and regulations around local food production*

This will require that a comprehensive review of the current bylaws be undertaken to determine how local food production is impacted and/or hindered by these policies. Such a review would then identify the areas of policy change that could help support and promote the expansion of the local food system.

This discussion could cover:

- funding a consultant to conduct the aforementioned review
- the development of a land inventory to get a clear picture of how land is currently being used and the potential for expanded food production
- the policy implications of additional food system infrastructure (e.g. community cold-storage, egg-grading, mobile abattoirs, backyard hens, etc.)

4) *Explore the feasibility of a local food distribution model*

This will involve a review of existing models in other communities and determine their applicability to Haliburton County. This may also require developing a fully costed business case for a local food distribution enterprise.

5) *Create an Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Committee*

Some Forum attendees suggested that Harvest Haliburton is already fulfilling some of the roles of such a committee. A stakeholder roundtable could consider how an advisory committee might be formed with a more targeted mandate, or how Harvest Haliburton could take on this role more formally.

6) *Put climate change and food security at the forefront of all food-related initiatives*

As these are issues that touch on every aspect of the food system, it will be essential that climate change and food security remain high priority topics of discussion throughout the process of implementing this action plan.

12. Feedback and Next Steps

In this final section, the feedback HH received following the Forum will provide some insight into how the community responded to this event. This can provide guidance for future events, and can help other communities adapt the framework of the event to suit their own community needs.



A follow-up survey was distributed to all Forum attendees and 42 responses were received. This is a response rate of approximately 56%, though it should be noted that respondents included several HH committee members. To summarize the results of the survey, between 85% and 100% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with all aspects of the event. Most respondents provided additional comments regarding each aspect of the day's agenda. Some edited examples are provided below:

Comments regarding the Ignite Presentations:

- A wonderful way to see the people behind the name/organization. Visual connection to substantial information.
- It also provided a real sense of our community and working together.
- Very informative, provided folks with a number of options for assistance and cooperation.
- It was very exciting to see how much has happened in the past decade.
- A presentation by a food experience provider would have been good to hear from.
- While they were great, I would have preferred to spend more time in the breakout sessions.



Comments regarding the Keynote presentations:

- Almost too much info for me to absorb by this point but interesting. Am still looking at handouts. Thank goodness for the great coffee and muffins:)
- Professional-comprehensive-cohesive- understandable and applicable.
- Heather Chandler's presentation could have been tailored to the Haliburton context.
- I liked both their enthusiasm and thought they spoke well. I felt their presentations were a bit long though...

Comments regarding the locally-sourced lunch prepared by Cook It Up trainees:

- Would like to have heard more about how and where the local food was sourced, as it was clearly an objective of the conference.
- I commend you on the fact that it was a free- plastic luncheon. Excellent, and I hope that future events will have zero plastic and proper separation of material. The food was excellent except for the soup which I found oversalted and could not finish.
- Very appreciative of having gluten-free and local options. Chaga (tea) was great - needed a small filter to serve.
- Great not to feel tired after eating!!!
- Not enough for those at the end of the line.



Comments regarding the Breakout Sessions:

- We needed a long discussion time afterwards to hear all the ideas and to receive input and suggestions that went under at the end. I think you missed a great portion because you were limited to just one group.
- A lot of good ideas came out of those meetings
- The facilitator could have been a bit more proactive to ensure everyone had a voice/opportunity to speak. Also a bit frustrating to have ideas but not the time to develop them or agree to work on them further.
- Impressed with facilitators for each group - learned a great deal about consensus group management
- Bit of confusion between issues and process.

Additional Comments:

- Would have liked to have heard from restaurant owners and the issues they have sourcing fresh and quality food items
- was great but more past this needs to be done. asap...keep the ball rolling. what are we actually trying to accomplish? Work with the farmers then work up from there.
- Communication and connections great. Almost too much info for time. Almost needed two days as I felt we were just getting started after trying to absorb everything. Needed more time to tell who was who. We need more gatherings like this on a local level to brain storm. You all coordinated a smooth event which takes a lot of time and effort. A very heart felt "thank you" to all the organizers.
- An annual event to keep process and updating ongoing and on-growing
- I hope that there is a follow-up event with review of goals achieved with an action plan and results achieved to-date.
- I found it very helpful, my adult grandson was with me and is taking horticultural at college, he really had his eyes opened. We would go again if there was another meeting.

Based on all of the comments we received, participants found the event timely and they felt that it covered a satisfactory breadth of topics. It was well organized, but attendees found that there was too little time for the afternoon's agenda. Most respondents would like to see this type of event happen again and more often, and many are willing to put in more time to see greater outcomes. 90.4% of respondents are somewhat or very likely to use the information and tools they learned about in their work and lives going forward. And 87.8% of respondents are somewhat, very, or extremely interested in helping to move the action plan forward.

HH's immediate next steps include contacting those participants and key stakeholders who expressed an interest in helping to carry the plan forward. We aim to bring these community members together to create an effective series of working groups with the intention of putting this plan into action. Readers of this report are also encouraged to reach out to HH via our website or Facebook page to offer support and to express an interest in helping out.

www.harvesthaliburton.com
www.facebook.com/HarvestHaliburton/

The Food and Agriculture Economic Development Forum and its outcomes have proven that, while there is a great deal of work to be done to improve the local food system, the engagement and enthusiasm of the community is overwhelming. This engagement will be critical to the process of putting the above actions and priorities into motion. There is much work to be done, but we are all up to the challenge.