

Summary of Buy Local Food Guide Survey

Conducted November 2012 – February 2013

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Background

Eight organizations with established Buy Local Food Guides were surveyed in an effort to research the feasibility of a food guide for Haliburton County. Though the surveys were quite comprehensive in order to obtain as much information as possible to assist in the research, they provided more of a general “feel” and overview of the successes, challenges and best practices for the development of a guide.

Not all questions in the survey were completed fully due to lack of record-keeping, change in staff or other factors attributed to the organizations being surveyed. In particular Harvest Haliburton identified the following primary goals for the research:

- To gain a better understanding of the resources required to develop and promote a Buy Local Food Guide
- To determine which type of Buy Local Food Guide would be most effective for Haliburton County
- To share these findings with other key stakeholders

Regions Surveyed & Population (2011 Statistics)

The following eight regions were surveyed:

Rainy River District – pop. 21,000

Timiskaming – pop. 33,000

Dufferin County – pop. 54,000

Muskoka District – pop. 57,000
The Regional Municipality of Durham – pop. 608,124
City of Kawartha Lakes – pop. 73,214
Grey Bruce (Grey County, Bruce County and Owen Sound region) – pop. 157,760
Northumberland County – pop. 82,126

Project Lead and Partners:

Lead organizations and number of individuals on the Project:

Agricultural/Culinary driven Associations/Federations - 5

Health unit - 1

Economic development - 2

Partners involved with the project:

Municipalities - 4

Economic development Corporation - 2

Provincial funding organization Trillium - 2

Types of Buy Local Food Guide:

Paper and Electronic - 5

Electronic only - 1

Paper only - 2

Funding Sources:

Local Economic Development organization - 4

Health Unit obtained funds - 1

Association membership - 4

Municipalities - 1

Provincial funding organizations (i.e. Trillium) - 3

Who did the work/gathered the info for the Buy Local Guide and had it printed:

Volunteers - 4

Paid staff - 4

Where was it promoted or distributed:

Trade shows /fairs/food events/blogs - 5

None - 2

Launching at farmers market - 2

Limitations

Lack of Measurements and Evaluation

Most regions had few if any measurements in place to evaluate outcomes, in cases that measurements were kept, they were very rudimentary, consisting of # of hits to site and or # of Buy Local Food Guides distributed. None of the regions surveyed had measurements in place that connected the Buy Local Food Guides directly to farm gate, restaurant, farmers' market etc. visits.

Only one of the respondents, the Northwest Health Unit, indicated it would be nice to know if there was an increase in sales and a change in farmer production planning for increased sales. They also noted it would be hard to track this as there were many partners and champions involved throughout the project and that there was little continuity.

One organization felt that the restaurants in the guide worked well based on verbal feedback – again no data or tracking was kept.

Cost

When asked about costing most respondents did not have information available due to turnover of human resources, lack of record keeping and time required to search archived files.

Paper and Electronic Maps challenges:

Data Collection – Most regions commented on the extensive number of hours required for initial contact and buy-in, collections of listing information and to get responses back to confirm inclusion.

Paper Maps Challenges

- Paper maps became outdated very quickly (Electronic versions of the buy local guide were easier to update)
- Limited or no funds to reprint map therefore maps were circulated with outdated info

The Rainy River indicated that their paper guide was not able to be updated for four years due to lack of funds.

Currently Muskoka is sitting on 2400 Buy Local Food Guides printed in 2011, that were described by the Savour Muskoka project manager as “null and void” and further went on to say they were “outdated” and that it is “not professional to give old stuff away.”

Notes of interest

The Rainy River Buy Local Food Guide is modelled after and used in association with Waterloo region Local Food Guides. They are simple clean and attractive formats designed by the local newspaper.

Muskoka was the only region to mention the importance of serving the local residents, not just the tourists. This may be due to the fact that they received plenty of positive feedback from the local residents.

What would you do differently?

Marketing

Two of the smaller regions mentioned that they would change their advertising plan by working within niche markets. Both mentioned a vehicle for this being green/foodie/sustainable magazines.

Proudly Northumberland stated for 2013 they plan to distribute their guide as an insert in a local magazine called the Watershed. Watershed Magazine is a charming snapshot of the diverse landscape, culture and people of Northumberland, Quinte and Prince Edward County. Subscription cost is \$16/year

Promotion and Evaluation

Three of the smaller regions respondents said they would use one or a combination of the following to promote and measure the Guide;

- Coupons
- Incentives
- Passports on map
- Online survey link on web based and paper map.

Buy Local Guide Listing Criteria

Muskoka stated that for 2013 they are going to require more criteria from farms/businesses wanting to be included in the guide. This is a result of customer feedback that showed a lack of continuity between what was advertised and what they found at the location. For instance- farm gate hours not upheld or restaurants that didn't source local foods etc.

Another surveyed stated "Only works for farms and businesses that really want people to come to them." (Maria Weijs Foodlink, Grey Bruce) Businesses listed must be market ready.

Other

"After five years experience here I would say it would be better to do a smaller format map and or do a map that combines arts/crafts/gardens and getting Public Health, OMAFRA and farm and tourist groups to all pitch in on the project." (Maria Weijs Foodlink, Grey Bruce)

Buy Local food guides for upcoming year 2013

Regions with established food guides such as Kawartha and Durham are continuing to publish paper maps while enhancing their marketing package with improvements & additions to electronic based guides, social media and apps. The focus for these organizations seems to be towards better marketing strategies and how to reach more people, rather than capacity building for farm/business/restaurant members.

Regions with challenges to sustain their guides continue to explore ways to fund the guides, build capacity in the farming/business community to meet consumer expectations and produce and deliver the guides in a way that is current and cost effective.

Main Findings

According to survey findings the regions with sustainable Buy Local Food Guides possessed all or most of the following elements:

- Large diverse groups of stakeholder/members which include but are not limited to, farmers, retail outlets and restaurants
- Stakeholder Association driven i.e., Kawartha Choice Branding
- Market ready farming businesses
- High level funding opportunities

- Well branded and integrated into the larger community via restaurant links, food events fair markets etc.

According to survey findings regions with unsustainable Buy Local Food Guides possessed all or most of the following elements:

- Lower resident populations
- Poor agricultural land
- Not well branded or integrated into the larger community
- Few and low level funding opportunities resulting in a lack of sustainability
- Not Stakeholder Association driven