

To:	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	April 25, 2019
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-CW-06-19
Title:	Regional Agri-Food Business Retention & Expansion Work Plan Update
Prepared by:	Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer
Reviewed by:	Savana Myers and Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented as per Resolution <i>CW96-19</i> ; Endorsed by County Council as per Resolution <i>CC38-19</i> .

Recommendation

1. That the final report and work plan for the **Regional Agri-Food Value Chain Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Study** be received as information; and
2. That the **Agriculture and Agri-Food Value Chain Regional Work Plan Grey Bruce and Simcoe Counties, 2019** be endorsed.

Executive Summary

The agriculture and food landscape is changing rapidly in response to local and global trends and pressures. The nature and needs of agri-food businesses in Grey County are changing as a result.

In 2018, Grey County collaborated on a Regional Agri-Food Value Chain Business Expansion and Retention Study (BR&E) to evaluate the state of the agri-food value chain. The results of this research will allow the partners to provide informed and strategic supports to the sector to ensure it remains healthy and viable.

The project partners (Grey, Simcoe and Bruce Counties, Georgian College, the cities of Barrie and Orillia, South Georgian Bay Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) and Nottawasaga Futures) have developed work plans based on the tri-county BR&E results, and strategic actions are currently underway.

Background and Discussion

Grey County has shown leadership when it comes to protecting lands and encouraging growth throughout the local agri-food value chain. The innovative policies recommended through Grey County's Official Plan (OP) are a leading example, ultimately providing the foundation for success, by encouraging food systems planning. For example, section five of the OP, *Cultivate Grey*, expands permitted uses, increases the size of on-farm diversified uses and encourages value-add by aligning to the Province's *Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas Guideline*. The OP also encourages flexibility through land use types and takes a strong stance to protect agricultural land for farming and related uses. Creating smaller farm lots can also be permitted, where new types of methods of farming demand less land. With enhanced policies such as these, innovative projects and initiatives can soon be actioned in support of our businesses. The regional agri-food BR&E then provided the tool to better understand the value chain and prepare a regional strategy that can make use of Grey County's enabling policies.

Developed by the Food Entrepreneurship committee (Food-E) to evaluate the current state of the agri-food value chain, the tri-county BR+E was completed. Food-E is a committee dedicated to the advancement of the agri-food sector in the south Georgian Bay region. Formed in 2013, it currently includes staff from Georgian College, county and municipal economic development, SBECs, and Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) across Grey, Simcoe and Bruce counties.

The Regional Agri-Food Value Chain Business Expansion and Retention Study project was supported by a Rural Economic Development (RED) fund grant, managed by Simcoe County. Grey County was a named partner on the RED grant.

Interviews were conducted from March through August 2018 across three counties, 72 of the 276 interviews were with agri-food businesses in Grey. Project consultants The Ainley Group provided data analysis and trends report in December 2018. The project committee finalized comprehensive work plans based on the findings in March 2019.

The key findings from the study resulted in five main areas of focus.

The following are the recommended priority areas the partners will address through joint projects:

	PRIORITY AREA	STRATEGY STATEMENT
1	Business Supports	Enhance supports for emerging and existing businesses within the sector.
2	Municipal Planning and Process	Improve municipal agriculture and agri-food related policies and procedures.
3	Agri-Tourism	Promote, support and grow emerging and existing agri-tourism products.
4	Infrastructure	Advocate for increased reliability of and access to necessary infrastructure.

	PRIORITY AREA	STRATEGY STATEMENT
5	Workforce	Support the development of a stronger workforce and more collaboration to train and retain workers in the agri-food sector.

For a comprehensive list of activities identified under each priority area, please see the work plan link in attachments.

Underpinning all these actions is the commitment to communicate effectively with community and industry partners, elected officials and the public.

Work is beginning on three regional joint projects in 2019:

1. Environmental scan of abattoir capacity, demand and availability
2. Creation of regional agri-food business support web portal
3. Development of agri- and agri-culinary tourism supports

Actions identified in the BR&E work plan align with priorities and actions developed in the Grey County Local Agri-Food Strategic Plan (April 2017), and the Grey County Strategic Plan.

At the same time, work continues on Grey County-specific projects as outlined in our strategic and departmental work plans. Recent activities include:

- Outreach to students at OFA Agriculture Career Fair
- Land owners and land seekers matchmaking event with FarmLINK
- Creation of agri-food sector infographic banners and rack cards

Upcoming and ongoing activities include:

- Farmers' market co-promotion and action planning in partnership with municipal EDO's
- Development of Grey County food brand
- Planning for Ag 4.0.3 in Hanover
- Business and sector promotion through annual Made in Grey June agri-food edition and quarterly agri-food newsletter
- Outreach at trade shows, conferences and events

Legal and Legislated Requirements

None.

Financial and Resource Implications

Project expenditures have been considered and accounted for in the Economic Development departmental budget. There will not be any additional staffing needs.

Relevant Consultation

Internal

Consultation with Planning and Transportation departments will take place as the Food-E partners address specific projects.

External

The project partners sought guidance from OMAFRA staff and consulted extensively with agriculture and food support organizations across the region, including Grey Agricultural Services, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, RTO7 (Regional Tourism Organization), commodity groups and others. The work plan includes comprehensive lists of organizations in the community who may be invited to partner on or advocate for specific actions in the work plan.

Appendices and Attachments

- [Regional Agri-Food Value Chain BR&E Work Plan](#)
- [Final trends report from consultant, The Ainley Group](#)
- [Final presentation to stakeholders in Grey and Bruce](#)
- [Grey County Local Agri-Food Strategic Plan](#)

Detailed work plan (including target dates and community partnerships) available to members of council and staff on request.