

To:	Chair Siegwart and Members of the Tourism Advisory Committee
Committee Date:	November 6, 2019
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-TAC-19-19
Title:	2020 Tourism and Local Food Campaign
Prepared by:	Bryan Plumstead, Philly Markowitz, Savanna Myers
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove, CAO
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	

Recommendation

1. That Report CAOR-TAC-19-19 regarding the 2020 Tourism and Local Food Campaign be received; and
2. That staff be directed to advance the concept to create a 2020 Tourism and Local Food Campaign.

Executive Summary

Grey County has a significant emerging culinary tourism product that has the ability to tie all other experiences together creating a strong sense (and taste) of place for both locals and visitors. Tourism and economic development staff see 2020 as an opportunity to weave efforts while momentum is high with local food growth, production and awareness.

Background and Discussion

For many years, Grey County Tourism has been building the Grey County brand; “Authentic Rural Experiences” through many channels (website, social media, media relations and influencers, print publications, tourism vehicle, trade shows) and particularly through its digital marketing campaign: Colour It My Way. Grey County’s outdoor experiences have been the focus while building more awareness of cuisine, arts and culture.

The new “Made in Grey” agri-food brand was launched in June 2019 by the Economic Development department to support the agriculture, food and tourism sectors across Grey, and to strengthen our diverse local agri-food economy and maintain strong and vibrant rural communities. Proudly Made in Grey is a comprehensive program designed to promote and support local farms, processors, restaurants, retailers, markets and events through branded materials, cross-promotion, social media and other sectoral supports.

For 2020 tourism and economic development propose to merge efforts in an overarching campaign to combine marketing and experience development with a focus on local agri-food and culinary capacity building. It will be a celebration of Grey County that connects landscapes, to food, to people.

Campaign rationale

Grey County’s food industry is recognized as a significant economic engine for the region, and there is significant momentum building in the local food and culinary sector. Our food story is differentiated from our competition because of the unique landscape that producers operate in and their connection to a four-season vacation destination.

The Grey County ‘terroir’ isn’t just defined by the soils or the climate. Its complex profile is also derived by the creative people who have chosen to make this unique landscape home and farm. They inject their own spin onto what they grow, process or make.

Farmers have had to match the productivity and limitations of the soil and the landscape to their crop and animal selection. Sheep graze on rocky lands, and apples and more recently grapes benefit from the topography of the rising slopes in the valleys, utilizing the constant winds that blow up from Georgian Bay. They are nurtured on the slopes of the County’s limestone hills, which share characteristics with Niagara’s famed “bench”.

Food experiences connect: rural to urban, adventure to relaxed, sophisticated to simple, and can not only attract people to a destination but can keep them circulating and spending money. Culinary travel and food experiences are trending in several markets including Grey County. More importantly, all our member municipalities have something to offer in this area and will benefit from increased profile.

Campaign Vision

The vision for this campaign is a giant kitchen table conversation with the goal to increase knowledge, awareness and benefits of local food, leading to increased visitation and sales. It will be a celebration of the unique flavors of Grey County, telling stories about how landscape influences people and the food they produce and eat. It’s

also about digging in to uncover what makes this place different and sharing that with our residents and visitors.

Momentum is very high with local food growth, production and awareness and this campaign weaves together tourism and economic development efforts. It will foster local pride and create a stronger sense of place and taste for locals and visitors. While we are focused on a one-year campaign, there is certainly potential for a longer-term county destination positioning.

Campaign Goals

- Enhance local pride and sense of place
- Remind people of the importance of food in their lives
- Connect activities to food and thus increasing spending
- Raise awareness of Grey County's food story
- Increase producer/farm sales
- Be cheeky and authentic to differentiate Grey County from other destinations
- Appeal to people's emotions

Target Audiences

- Local residents (pride of place with goal to shift in their purchasing behaviors)
- In-market visitors and out-market visitors
- County staff (internal program linked to the County's wellness initiatives)

Alignment with County Plans

Grey County Tourism - Destination Development Action Plan

Grey County Tourism's [Destination Development Action Plan](#) (DDAP) confirmed the goal to "Increase sustainable tourism revenues through managing and marketing Grey County as a tourism destination". The Action Plan included a SWOT analysis, in which Food and Agri-tourism emerged as a key strength, and "Growing Agri-tourism" as an opportunity.

Product development and marketing of Grey County that differentiates the County from its competition is at the core of this plan. Our marketing strategy brings the brand; "Authentic Rural Experiences" to life through innovative marketing and communications channels. These include #ColourItMyWay, a visiting friends and relatives (VFR) campaign and a robust media relations and social media influencers program. All initiatives include a substantial focus on local food, agri-food and culinary content. Food/culinary is also identified as one of three key themes for experience development, alongside outdoor adventure (including cycling) and arts and culture.

Grey County Economic Development – Local Food

Local agri-food products and experiences are recognized as key economic drivers through the [Grey County Economic Development Strategy](#) and [Local Agri-Food Strategy](#), and were brought to life through the [Proudly Made in Grey Brand](#) launched in 2019. Going forward, opportunity exists to align Grey County Tourism marketing efforts to include local food and develop Grey's tourism infrastructure and offerings surrounding local food products and experiences.

Provincial Level Research

Recent research indicates that local food and culinary experiences have distinct potential in the tourism industry. Further, the numbers show that it is a lucrative market. [Ontario's Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2011 – 2015](#):

- Deliberate culinary tourists (those who travel specifically for a culinary experience): 15.2% of Ontario trips and \$816 million in total expenditures related to their trips.
- Opportunistic (enjoy culinary experiences when travelling due to other trip motivators) and accidental (will have a culinary experience while on a trip if it is presented to them as an option) culinary tourists: 17.8% of Ontario trips and \$954.7 million in total expenditures related to their trips.

[The Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance and Skift, February 2015](#) special report 'The Rise of Food Tourism' highlights research findings that support the notion of an increase (77%) in food as a tourism driver and the prevalence surrounding it.

The report suggests ten criteria for developing successful food tourism destinations:

1. ✓ Leadership
2. ✓ Market-ready or near-market-ready culinary products and resources
3. An integrated strategy
4. Partnership and community-based collaboration
5. Financial support and performance measures
6. ✓ Destinations with good access from key origin markets
7. ✓ Sufficient market intelligence
8. ✓ Food tourism resources distinctive to the region
9. ✓ A critical mass of agri- and/or food tourism experiences
10. ✓ An effective Destination Marketing Organization

✓ (Currently in place). Numbers 3 to 5 will be accomplished through this initiative.

Next Steps

Grey County tourism and economic development staff will work with BC Hughes to refine and implement this concept for 2020 and beyond:

Short Term Implementation

1. Adopt new agri-food focused tourism positioning through stakeholder buy-in.
2. Develop and execute individualized campaigns specifically designed for each target audience that motivate people to engage with the Grey County food story. Campaigns will be designed to get people's attention and act on their reaction to it.

Long Term Opportunities

3. Develop a culinary tourism product development and marketing implementation strategy, related to the new food-focused framework.
4. Create a Food Sector Implementation Plan based upon the recommendations in the 'Made in Grey' Economic Development Strategy.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

None with this report.

Financial and Resource Implications

Funds for this campaign are included for Council consideration in the 2020 tourism and economic development budgets. Additional opportunities such as website development will be reviewed with IT staff.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal (list) – Tourism Department, Economic Development Department
- External (list) –

Appendices and Attachments

None.