

## Addendum to Report PDR-PCD-17-14

**To:** Chair McQueen and Members of the Planning and Community Development Committee

**From:** Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer, Sarah Morrison, Intermediate Planner, and Scott Taylor, Senior Planner

**Meeting Date:** January 19, 2016

**Subject:** Agricultural Outreach Update Report

**Status:** Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution PCD31-16; Endorsed by County Council February 2, 2016 per Resolution CC20-16

### Recommendation(s)

**WHEREAS County staff were directed to establish better communication between the County and existing agricultural organizations through Grey Agricultural Services, with the aim of getting more feedback from the agricultural community on County services and programs;**

**AND WHEREAS the County has a desire to improve communications with the agricultural community, to better serve their needs;**

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Addendum to Report PDR-PCD-17-14, be received for information purposes;**

**AND THAT this report be shared with the participants of the recent Agricultural Outreach Event in Markdale for their information and feedback;**

**AND FURTHER THAT County Planning and Economic Development staff be directed to continue with agricultural engagement activities and report back to the Planning and Community Development Committee on agricultural issues within the County's mandate.**

### Background

At the January 21, 2014 Planning and Community Development Committee meeting Committee passed motion PCD29-14 (see below), which was later adopted by Council.

*“THAT staff prepare a report for the Planning and Community Development Committee’s consideration regarding the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee.”*

Following the preparation of a background staff report (linked to in the Attachments section of this Report), the Planning and Community Development Committee supported the below motion at the May 20, 2014 Committee meeting. This motion was adopted by County Council at the June 2014 meeting.

*“WHEREAS County staff were directed to prepare a report regarding consideration of the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee;*

*AND WHEREAS the County already has a defined role in agriculture, including financial support for Grey Agricultural Services Centre, and an Economic Development Officer – Local Food;*

*AND WHEREAS the farm community is already broadly served by a diverse range of existing agricultural organizations, including Grey Agricultural Services;*

*AND WHEREAS the County has a desire to better communicate with the farm community, to better serve their needs;*

*NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that staff be directed to implement Option 2, as outlined in report PDR-PCD-17-14, to establish better communication between the County and existing agricultural organizations through Grey Agricultural Services, with the aim of getting more feedback from the farm community on County services and programs.”*

As per Committee’s direction, County Economic Development and Planning staff have been working to ‘open up lines of communication’ with the various agricultural sectors.

### *Actions Taken to Date*

The first key milestone towards working to build a relationship with the agricultural community was to meet with staff from Grey Agricultural Services (GAS) in the early Fall of 2014. GAS staff have been extremely helpful throughout this process and will be a key partner moving forward. Drawing on the existing knowledge and agricultural contacts of GAS staff, it was decided that;

1. Grey County staff should continue to attend Grey Bruce Farmers Week in Elmwood each year, and
2. The County should host an agricultural outreach event with representatives from various agricultural sectors. The purpose of the event would be to

introduce County staff, and to begin to talk about issues impacting agriculture in Grey County.

County Economic Development and Planning staff did attend a few days of Farmers Week in January 2015, though severe weather hampered attending some other days.

The Agricultural Outreach Event was initially planned for May 7, 2015, but was eventually held on December 2, 2015 at the GAS building in Markdale. A summary on this event will be provided later on in the report.

Other recent actions taken by County staff include;

1. On-going support and promotion of local food by the County Economic Development staff, including marketing, appearances at trade shows, and heightened focus on the Visit Grey website,
2. Partnering with GAS staff, County staff developed a media campaign for Ontario Ag. Week in October that profiled local producers, and was featured in the Owen Sound Sun Times,
3. Development and delivery of the Food Safety Regulations curriculum in partnership with Georgian College, Public Health, and Industry representatives,
4. Assistance with writing grant funding applications for farmers to government funding programs, including the Greenbelt Fund, Growing Forward II, and Trillium grants. In many cases the applicants have ultimately been successful in obtaining the grants/funding offered through these programs,
5. Continuing with the Economic Development Business Tours, including recently partnering with the Township of Southgate for a Township led day-long on-farm business tour in Southgate,
6. Attendance at Politicians Day in Chesley, which is hosted by the two Federations of Agriculture for Grey and Bruce Counties,
7. On-going financial support for GAS (annual donation of \$25,000 along with providing the facilities within Grey Gables at a cost of \$20,700), and 4-H (annual support of \$4,000),
8. On-going nuisance beaver and coyote programs, and
9. The completion of an On-Farm Business Policy Review by University of Waterloo Planning Students.

Building on the successful initiatives, County staff desire to better engage with the broader agricultural community (e.g. commodities agriculture, local food, on-farm businesses, etc.), such that we can better understand barriers to their business success.

## *Agricultural Outreach Event Summary*

The key theme of this event was how can the County better serve farmers and the agricultural community. The question County staff sought advice on was *'how can we help and support you?'*

The event held on December 2<sup>nd</sup> was well attended with a broad cross-section of agricultural sectors and related associations. Those in attendance included representation from;

- Christian Farmers,
- Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS),
- Grey County Farm Safety Association,
- Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA),
- Ontario Canola Growers,
- Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario,
- National Farmers Union (NFU),
- Georgian Bay Fruit Growers,
- Grey Agricultural Services,
- Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association,
- Agroecology,
- Dairy,
- Field crops, and
- Political representatives from Grey Highlands and Grey County.

Following introductions, County staff gave a presentation on existing County services which impact agriculture in the Economic Development, Planning, and Transportation Services portfolios. Throughout the presentation, and after, there was wide-ranging discussion on issues (County, Provincial, and Federal), which impact various agricultural sectors. A brief summary of the issues discussed has been provided below.

- Questions over the County's Green in Grey Natural Environment Study and how it will impact agricultural/rural lands.
- Cost of entry into farming is too high for new farmers.
- Renting land can be an option, but provides no security to the renter year-over-year, and little incentive to make improvements to the land e.g. tile drainage.
- Could the County look at smaller farm sizes, but if so how would you keep people from buying up the land for estate purposes?
- Increasing instances of conflict between farmers, carrying out normal farm practices, and non-farm neighbours.

- Nuisance animals such as coyotes are troublesome to livestock sectors, but somewhat beneficial to those with orchards as they keep the deer away.
- The 30 day limit on the coyote program is problematic.
- Concerns over staffing changes at Provincial ministries such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry which has made it more difficult to get permission to trap/kill nuisance animals on-farm.
- Existing grant and funding programs (e.g. Growing Forward II) can be too onerous, unreliable/uncertain, or ineffective to meeting farmer's needs. Some of the scoring for these grant programs can be quite subjective and the applications can become an exercise in creative writing, which is not an ability some people have.
- Some grant programs do not meet smaller farmer's needs and the need for 'micro-grants' was discussed. There was also talk of a larger organization, such as the County, applying for one of the larger grants and acting as an umbrella organization to then offer smaller and micro-grants to reach more farms with this grant funding.
- Questions about Wild Chervil, the licensing of the spray, and the County's actions in this regard.
- Questions about endangered species (Bobolink) and invasive species (Phragmites).
- Concerns over larger farm equipment using the roads and the need for more education on slower moving vehicles. A 'share-the-road' type program for farm vehicles was discussed.
- Questions were raised about County and Municipal signage policies and what it would take to get caution signs installed on our roadways.
- What are the policies surrounding surplus farm dwelling severances, two houses on one farm, and garden suites?

One of the other key purposes of event was to look at how the County communicates with the various agricultural sectors moving forward. County staff are cognizant of the fact that farmers are already over-worked and do not generally have time for additional meetings. After a good discussion, the consensus amongst the attendees was that any communication strategy needed to be;

1. Multi-faceted – print/letters, email/social media, along with the occasional meeting, particularly if it could be tied in with an existing agricultural sector meeting (e.g. have the County attend an existing NFU meeting), would all be necessary to communicating with the agricultural community.
2. County representation (both elected officials and staff) at existing board meetings would be appreciated. There were some boards which used to have the Warden or chosen representative sit on which no longer do.

3. Communicating through Grey Agricultural Services seems to work well.
4. Any communications, especially those where the County is seeking feedback, need to be reflective of agricultural timelines i.e. responses or attendance at a meeting during harvest time would be greatly reduced.
5. Attendance at local agricultural events such as Grey Bruce Farmers Week or Politicians Day is also a great way for formal/informal interactions and networking.
6. Seek input from the agricultural community before making new policies or policy decisions.
7. Farm tours involving politicians and senior staff would also be appreciated.

### *Next Steps*

Moving forward County staff see the need to continue on with existing County services and programming. However, there are also additional needs the County should be attending to, in order to build this relationship with the agricultural community.

In the short-term (1 – 3 months) County staff owe the participants of the event some answers on questions around Wild Chervil spray and road-side signage policies. County staff also plan on attending Grey Bruce Farmers Week in early January 2016 and Politicians Day (if invited) in March 2016. County staff would also like to meet with GAS staff to map out some further strategies moving forward.

In the medium term (3 – 12 months) County would like engage the agricultural community on;

1. The new Grey County Strategic Plan,
2. The Local Food Strategy,
3. The changes to the County's nuisance beaver and coyote programs,
4. On-farm business policy changes in the County Official Plan, and
5. Other agricultural/rural policy changes in the County Plan.

In this same time-frame County staff would also seek to;

1. Set up a farm tour (or tours) for politicians and staff to better familiarize themselves with agricultural practices across the County,
2. Continue to work with staff at GAS and draw on their expertise and contacts within the agricultural sector (this action item is applicable in the short, medium and long term time-frames),
3. Determine which agricultural sector groups would desire a regular County representative at their board meetings, and

4. Investigate existing funding sources with staff from GAS and OMAFRA to determine if there is any role for the County to play in increasing access/availability to funding for farmers in Grey County.

In the long term the County would continue to engage the agricultural community on their needs, through meetings, surveys, general discussions etc. The County would then determine the feasibility of adjusting programming, services, or advocacy with senior levels of government accordingly.

One of the other suggestions at the December 2<sup>nd</sup> Event was for the County to hold a Farm Forum in March 2016. County staff have discussed this idea, and it may be something to pursue in future years, but at this stage it may not be feasible to pull together in time for March 2016.

## Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

### Considerations

At this stage County staff do not foresee any additional staffing, financial, legal or information technology needs stemming from this report. The County's 2016 budget has already been set, and the action items outlined above should generally fit within existing departmental budgets and work plans.

Moving forward beyond 2016, additional financial resources or staff time/resources may be required to better address the needs of the agricultural community. At this stage with the limited discussions to date, it is simply too early to predict future needs in this regard.

### Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Establishing better communications with the agricultural community has the ability to touch on many of the goals from the County's Strategic Plan. Specifically goals; 1: Expanding the Prosperity Base, 2: Enabling Healthy and Resilient Communities, 4: Making Connections, and 5: Listening and Working Together, would all be applicable to the subject matter contained within this report.

### Attachments

[PDR-PCD-17-14 Agricultural Advisory Committee](#)

Respectfully submitted by,

Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer

Sarah Morrison, Intermediate Planner

Scott Taylor, Senior Planner

Directors Sign Off: *Randy Scherzer and Sharon Vokes*