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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2024-INFO-62
Date: October 11, 2024

Subject:

Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee 2024 Farm Tour, File: A01-38-02

Recommendation:

Receive for Information

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the 22nd annual Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC) Farm Tour event, which was held at the Scugog Community Recreation Centre in Port Perry (Scugog) on September 26, 2024.

2. Background

2.1 Since its inaugural tour in 2003, DAAC has showcased more than 40 farms and other agricultural facilities across Durham Region to more than 1,700 participants.

2.2 The 2024 tour was originally scheduled to take place at Twin Erin Farm and Two Blokes Cidery. Due to unforeseen issues in the late summer, the tour was moved to the Scugog Community Recreation Centre, bringing the elements of the Farm Tour directly to the participants.

3. Event Overview

3.1 Over 130 participants representing municipal and provincial governments, public agencies including conservation authorities, school boards, post-secondary institutions, municipal advisory and economic development committees, the financial and insurance industry, the agricultural community and media attended the event. The tour highlighted the importance of Durham's agricultural sector, Durham's agricultural heritage as well as some of the issues and challenges faced by the industry.

3.2 The theme for this year's tour was "Forward Thinking Agriculture in Durham Region". A variety of topics were covered including:

- The challenges of operating and establishing an on farm-diversified use (OFDU);
- The experience of farmers obtaining permits and permissions for OFDU's on their farms;
- The realities of operating a family farm;
- Agriculture as a complex, competitive market that requires innovation;
- The importance of marketing to farm businesses;
- Environmental management on farms;
- How Trent University's experimental farm operates; and
- The variety of agricultural transportation equipment for transporting goods;

3.3 At the event, there were several displays for attendees to visit and learn from, staffed by several organizations, including:

- District 12 Grain Farmers of Ontario;
- Durham College Galen Weston Centre for Food and Barrett Centre;
- Durham Farm Connections;
- Durham Region Federation of Agriculture;
- Durham West 4-H;
- Durham Workforce Authority;
- Greenbelt Foundation;
- Invest Durham;
- Kawartha Conservation Authority;
- Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority;
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness; and
- Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association;

3.4 At the event lunch, DAAC Vice-Chair Dave Risebrough welcomed attendees to the event and introduced the themes of the tour.

3.5 Regional Chair and CEO John Henry then spoke about:

- The success of the food products grown in Durham;
- The important contributions of farming and agriculture in Durham;
- How farmers feed our community and economy; and
- Progressive and innovative farms in the Region

3.6 Township of Scugog Mayor Wilma Wotten the spoke about:

- How agriculture is critical to Scugog's identity;
- The economic importance of the agriculture industry in Scugog;
- Her deep appreciation for the agricultural way of life and appreciation for the land; and
- The importance of agricultural innovation.

3.7 Adam Hayes and Don King of the Soil Resource Group provided the keynote address on the ONFarm program and the importance of soil health to agriculture.

3.8 Participants attended presentation stations featuring the following speakers:

- a. Matt Porter, Trent University - Trent University Experimental Farm and Modern Challenges in Agriculture;
- b. Jordan and Alyson McKay, Willowtree Farms & Pingles Farm Market - Diversifying Farm Operations;
- c. Matt Sommerville, Sommerville Farms - The Opportunities and Challenges of On Farm Diversified Uses and Family Farms; and
- d. Agriculture Transportation Display and Presentation

4. Event Feedback

4.1 Each year, participants are asked to complete a survey that is used by DAAC to evaluate the success of the tour and to help plan for future events. This year, an electronic survey was circulated to attendees following the event, along with paper surveys that were available at the tour. From the responses received, almost all agreed that the tour met or exceeded their expectations. Some general comments were:

- Excellent presentations! Something for everyone, loved the format as well;
- Great day. Speakers were fantastic and the transportation display was great. Food was amazing! Excellent location; and
- The organizing committee did an excellent job pivoting from the planned farm tour by bringing in several interesting speakers.

4.2 Participants were asked what the “Take Home” message was for them. Responses included:

- That our farming community is filled with innovators. They are a great resource for understanding not only the complexities of the land and doing day to day business, but the economics and social dynamics involved in such a competitive market;
- Agriculture is an important industry in Durham. Agriculture is quite varied, and policies need to adapt to the changing face of agriculture. Environmental management is a key part of agriculture; and
- Farmers have a unique perspective and understanding of the land that is invaluable, and we need to work together to protect our environment. Exchanging knowledge with opportunities like this can be very helpful.

5. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 5.1 In January 2024, Council considered DAAC’s 2024 Workplan through Commissioner’s Report [#2024-P-1](#). The Farm Tour is a major component of the DAAC Workplan.
- 5.2 In October 2023, [#2023-INFO-87](#) was released, summarizing the 2023 DAAC Farm Tour.

6. Relationship to the Strategic Plan

- 6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:
- a. Environmental Sustainability - Protect, preserve and restore the natural environment, including greenspaces, waterways, parks, trails, and farmlands.
 - b. Economic Prosperity - Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 DAAC is once again commended for its continued efforts in advancing the knowledge of the agricultural industry in Durham. The annual farm tour continues to be a valuable element of the Council approved work plan for the Committee.
- 7.2 A copy of this report will be forwarded to the Area Municipalities, the Durham Federation of Agriculture, Durham Farm Fresh, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance and DAAC.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development