Chapter 4: Southwestern Ontario

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Summary

- The Region of Waterloo and the County of Wellington have perhaps a longer history and more developed projects, but all Counties have food projects underway.
- Food projects in this landscape are highly networked and collaborative; food producers are especially linked in, and producer perspectives are highly valued.
- Many food initiatives have achieved some measure of financial stability, although funding remains an on-going concern.
- There is a significant increase in the number of farmers' markets, in the use of local food maps, and in the popularity of the CSA model.
- The greatest challenges are in the overall societal choices that favour the industrial large-scale and low-priced approach to food production and choice.
- The greatest frustration expressed is towards the policy and infrastructure that inhibits small-scale production and local distribution.
- Particularly difficult are policies and regulations that are not small-scale sensitive, such as with abbatoirs. A lack of infrastructure to facilitate the distribution of local food is seen as a second significant barrier.
- There is a desire to see OMAFRA shift efforts from the current heavy emphasis on marketing to an effort to increase local food supply and to an expansion in local food distribution by investing in scale-appropriate infrastructure.
- Organizations and producers are concerned that there is more and more competition for scarce funding that is dedicated to local food projects.

Background

Oxford County has 1,990 farms listed in the 2006 census and over 100 commercial and industrial agri-business ventures. In the County, 61% of all farms are classified as commercial farms, compared with only 46% of all farms in Southern Ontario. Farm cash receipts for main commodities totals at $658.4 million. Oxford produces 20.7% of the province's white beans and 23% of turkeys. Dairy, hog and tobacco farms account for nearly half of the farms. Cash crops, poultry and specialty products such as emu, ginseng, fruits, vegetables, maple syrup and garlic are increasingly popular in response to recent niche-market and value-added trends in agriculture. Agri-tourism is also on the rise.

For Perth County, agriculture, value-added agriculture and local food are considered the drivers of economic growth and job creation in the community. In 2006, Perth County had 2,438 census farms and 201,600 hectares of farmland. In 2009, farm cash receipts for main commodities totaled $604.9 million. Dairy receipts led the way at $190 million. Pork producers were second highest in farm receipts, at $114.1 Million. Perth County

accounts for 30% of the province's bean production. There are 7 Farmers' Markets, approximately 20 food processing companies, and there are hundreds of value-added food producers offering products at the farmgate.

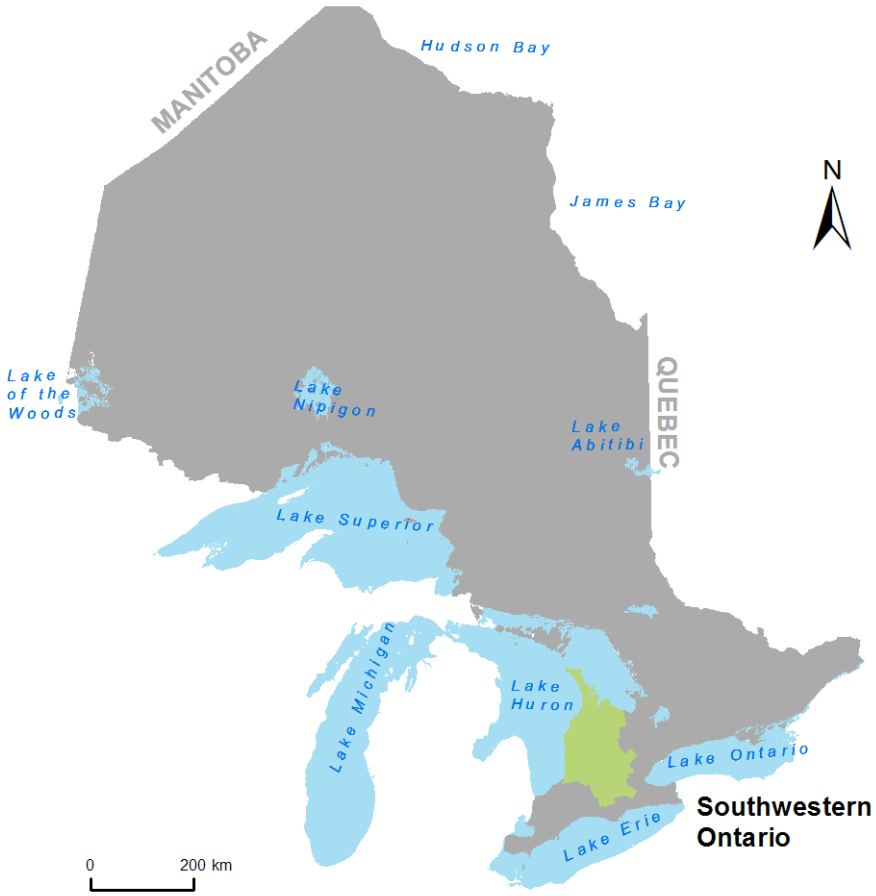

Figure 4.1: Map of the Southwestern Ontario Region

Waterloo Region has one of the most economically-productive agricultural land bases in the province. Each of the individual municipalities/townships in the region exceeds the provincial average in terms of total farm receipts per farm and per acre. In 2000, Waterloo Region reported an average of $1,681 in farm receipts per acre of farmland, making it the second highest producing region on a per acre basis in Ontario (exceeded only by the Niagara fruit belt). Net revenue per farm in 2000 was $39,000, almost twice the Ontario average of $21,534. In 2001, the average farm size in Waterloo Region was 156 acres, compared to the provincial average of 226 acres. The high productivity of these smaller farms is largely due to the high concentration of livestock farms in the Region, which tend to be smaller than crop production farms. Census data from 2006 indicates that there were 1,444 farms in Waterloo Region. With 282 farms, beef producers are the most numerous in Waterloo Region, followed closely by 263 farms reporting dairy as their primary focus. Together, dairy and beef farms account for 38% of all farms in Waterloo Region. Another 523 farms report their main industry to be hogs,

pigs, poultry (and eggs), goats, sheep and other animals. Altogether, animal farms make up 74% of all farms in Waterloo Region. Chickens (2.5 million) and hogs (140,000) top the list for population numbers when it comes to farm animals. The remaining farms produce field crops, vegetables, fruit, and specialty products. According to Statistics Canada, production of total vegetables (excluding greenhouse vegetables) increased by 129.1 % in Waterloo Region between 2001 and 2006 while the provincial and national data indicated decreases for these crops during the same time period: - 8.6 % in Ontario and - 6.5 % in Canada. While not a significant contributor to the provincial total, Waterloo Region's greenhouse industry continues to grow, accounting for 62,000 square meters of food and nursery stock under cultivation in 2006. Grain corn, soybeans, and winter wheat are also important cash crops for farmers in Waterloo Region.

Wellington County agriculture plays a key role in the local economy, with a diverse farming community that includes 2,588 farms on 196,621 hectares of land. Farm cash receipts in 2009 for main commodities was $511.3 million. The County's agriculture is evolving and has exceeded provincial growth for the last few years. Wellington County and the City of Guelph also have a large agricultural support network, including mills, suppliers, distributors and service providers for the agricultural industry. The farms that are represented on the Guelph-Wellington Local Food Map are as diverse as the landscape including small scale, horse-powered production to larger farms that specialize in specific crops.

Agriculture has been historically important for Dufferin County. Although a portion of Dufferin's economy still depends on agriculture, the economy is diversifying. With recent influxes of population, industries related to residential and commercial construction have grown. Manufacturing, although suffering somewhat in the recent economic downturn, is also an important sector of Dufferin's economy. Tourism is becoming significant, as the County takes a more proactive role in attracting visitors to the area through groups such as the Headwaters Country Tourism Association, featuring farmers' markets and pick-your-own operations. Farm case receipts for Dufferin Couty in 2009 totaled $86.6 million and there were 893 farms recorded in the 2006 census, which are based on 77,136 hectares of land. Dufferin produces 15% of Ontario's potatoes.

The Grey Bruce Regional Economic Development Partnership has developed an Agri Value-Added Strategy for the two counties, focusing on diversifying the agricultural economy. Grey County has 2,687 farms based on 229,543 hectares of land. Grey is the number one producer for hay, apples, sheep and lambs and the number two producer of cattle in Ontario. Grey County farms produce 10.15% of the barley and 15.42% of mixed grains in Ontario, as well as more exotic foods like buffalo, emu, wild boar and rare mushrooms. Honey, maple syrup, fruits and vegetables, organic produce and various other home grown/made products can be found at farmers' markets and farm-gate and roadside stands. Farm cash receipts for main commodities in 2009 were at $243.5 million. Bruce County farm cash receipts for main commodities in 2009 was $359.7 million. there were 2,259 farms reported in 2006, based on 248,136 hectares of land. Bruce accounts for 8.13% of the province's beef cattle farms, 10.05% of mixed grain and 10.93% of dry white beans.

Huron County is the most agriculturally productive county in Ontario. It has more farms (2,738 listed in the 2006 census), more hectares of farmland (292,803) and more gross farm receipts ($728.0 million) than any other county or district in the Province. New employment and economic opportunities can be found within and related to the development of agriculture and agri-related industries. One of Canada's largest inland grain handling facilities is in the Village of Hensall, with three major grain handling/processing companies. There is additional grain handling capacity at several other inland facilities throughout the county, as well as Goderich Elevators Limited located at the Port of Goderich, on the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Seaway. The County also has a growing livestock sector, housing 165,000 cattle (beef and dairy), 630,000 hogs and 5.2 million poultry. Huron produces 32.08% of the province's white bean harvest.

Participants

A total of 25 interviews were conducted; those interviewed represented organizations or initiatives in the following categories: municipal government; public health; producer organizations; food system networking initiatives; producers; retailers; farmers' markets; OMAFRA; Premier's Award winners; universities; and food hub and community food centre projects. It is difficult to clearly state how many participants fit into each category, as there tended to be a significant amount of overlap. Based on the 25 interviews conducted, brief summaries of 18 food hub or local food network initiatives and/or organizations are provided below, along with three in-depth case studies that are each based on additional interviewing and site visits.

In general, the interviews were fairly evenly distributed across the 7 counties included in this region. The notable exception is Dufferin County, where only one interview was completed with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Attempts were made to conduct interviews with people from a number of other initiatives in Dufferin, including a farmers' market and a conservation group recently engaged in food security work; however, these efforts proved unsuccessful. The challenge in finding study participants in Dufferin County is perhaps indicative of the relatively-quiet local food scene, when compared to other counties in the province.

Common Accomplishments

By far the most widely-cited accomplishment of the various organizations and initiatives from Southwestern Ontario that participated in this study was the building of bridges between actors, and the creation of collaborative working relationships and coalitions. In the words of Gueph-Wellington Local Food coordinator Kate Vsetula: "Networking and creating linkages is key…and making sure plans are going to be win-win for all the different actors involved." Many participants highlighted the particular importance of ensuring that the producer perspective is represented in any initiative, and the efforts to do that across the region were considered a special accomplishment.

Another significant accomplishment is the fact that so many local food initiatives have managed to achieve some measure of financial stability. While finding funding remains a challenge for some initiatives, others are realizing profits, particularly as new opportunities are created to foster increased sales of local food to individual, business and institutional consumers. These opportunities include a boom in local farmers' markets, the widespread adoption of the Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map concept (initially spearheaded by Waterloo Region's Foodlink), and the increasing popularity of CSAs and other direct marketing models. In the opinion of Theresa Schumilas, who runs a CSA, consumers are responding to the message about local food because it represents "a positive marketing strategy in the middle of a doom and gloom message about destruction. I think people respond to positive things; they're not motivated by fear."

Common Challenges

The most general challenge discussed by many research participants in the region was an overall societal, systemic preference for a food system model based on large-scale, highly specialized, industrialized production and export-orientation. The flip side of this problem was frustration at the lack of systemic support for small-scale ventures, particularly those with a focus on local production-consumption chains.

In terms of specific manifestations of this perceived systemic bias, the most frequently cited example was a regulatory structure that tends to inhibit the development of small-scale production and local distribution. In Oxford County, one person working to promote local food explained that "one of the county's most prominent small-scale meat producers just went under as a result of regulatory strangulation." The strangulation metaphor was repeated by someone involved in a small-scale farmers' market, who felt that more markets could easily be viable – potentially with more regular hours - if zoning bylaws were not prohibitive. In addition to challenges associated with zoning, the need to conform to public health standards designed for large-scale production facilities was the most important regulatory challenge cited by participants.

A second specific barrier to the development of local food initiatives, that is reflective of the same systemic bias, is a lack of infrastructure to facilitate the distribution of local food. One illustration of this issue is that fact that a great deal of produce grown in Grey is shipped to the Ontario Food Terminal, only to be sent back to Grey for sale in supermarkets. According to Waterloo Region organic producer (and packer-distributor) Wolfgang Pfenning, a big part of the distribution challenge is that supermarkets "want to buy full tractor-trailer loads out of the US because they can buy all year round from the same supplier."

At the policy level, participants identified challenges beyond the aforementioned regulatory issues. Notable examples included a lack of tax incentives and/or subsidies for small-scale production aimed at the local market and a lack of public procurement policies that would favour local food in most jurisdictions. In the case of OMAFRA more specifically, there was a fair amount of consensus that, although the work it has done to promote local food has been appreciated, the heavy focus on marketing should be shifted

to a focus on how to grow supply and, even more importantly, ease distribution - for example, by investing in local food infrastructure.

One final demonstration of the challenges associated with a food system that undervalues local food is the fact that, although consumer awareness and interest has increased rapidly in recent years, recognizing the value of buying local, or participating in other food-related activities, has not reached the mainstream in all communities. This seems to be a particular barrier in more rural areas of the region, such as Huron County where one local food promoter explains that some people "just don't have the education necessary to appreciate local food, or a food hub. [They] don't see a problem just going to the grocery store,..They don't think about the implications of it." In Oxford County, another local food activist suggests that "it's shocking how relatively few people are involved, even in a successful initiative."

In addition to the barrier of insufficient consumer support for local food, some participants also raised the issue of insufficient funding for local food projects, particularly as the movement grows and increasing numbers of organizations must compete for scarce resources. Several participants suggested that a lack of funding to develop local food projects is even more of a problem for producers, who do not tend to be eligible for many grant programs designed for non-profit agencies.

Case Study 1: Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre

Location: Hillsburgh
Website: http://www.everdale.org

Interviewees: Brendan Johnson (Executive Director) and Gavin Dandy (Farm Director)

Initial interview (Brendan Johnson only): July 11, 2011 (Irena Knezevic)
Site visit: August 16, 2011 (Erin Nelson)

Overview

In the late 1960's and early 70's, the land where Everdale Organic Farm and Education Centre is located was known as Everdale Place, where a free school was operated. Following the closing of the school, the land was used for many different purposes, though none took hold. Then, in the 1990's, Gavin Dandy, Karen Campbell, Wally Seccombe, and Lynn Bishop decided to build an organic farm and learning centre on the property.

Today, Everdale is a registered charity. One of Canada's most established and well-known farm-based local food hubs, it is a working farm that produces not only food, but also education and new farmers, and its work helps build bridges between rural and urban interests. Everdale runs a CSA providing organic food to approximately 300 people in the

surrounding communities and in Toronto; however, Executive Director Brendan Johnson points out that "the real niche Everdale fills is education."

Every year, the farm hosts students from kindergarten through high school. An emphasis is placed on repeat visits over the years, so that learning can be graduated. Everdale also has a farm intern program that sees new and/or aspiring farmers spend a season gaining practical and theoretical knowledge about the production and business aspects of running an organic farm. As part of this program, Everdale tries to help those looking to obtain land connect with people who have land available.

In addition to the school visits and farm intern program, Everdale also runs a number of workshops and events throughout the year designed to get the general public engaged in, and excited about, organic farming.

Human Resources

Everdale is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors, with Johnson pointing out "how challenging it is to get Board members. I'm always grateful when people are willing to do that." In addition to the Board members, Everdale also sees a lot of volunteers, especially during harvest time. These volunteers tend to be young people, many of whom come as part of the program Willing Workers on Organic Farmers (WWOOF); however, Brendan notes that "we get some Bay Street people too."

In terms of paid staff, there are 8 regular full time staff members, including Johnson and Dandy, along with a number of part time and seasonal positions. During the 8 month farm season, there are usually approximately 6 full time interns at the farm as well. Staffing is always a challenge, because it tends to be very difficult to find grant funding to pay salaries.

Physical Resources

As is the case with staff salaries, finding funds to pay for physical resources has proven to be a challenge. "It's hard," explains Johnson, "because no one wants to fund a roof." As a result, the buildings that exist at Everdale (which include a strawbale construction used as office space and dorms) have been built gradually over time, as fundraising efforts have permitted.

When it comes to communication resources, Everdale takes advantage of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and also publishes a newsletter and manages a website. Using social media for marketing has been great, because it means that "marketing resources are next to nothing" – an advantage given that "we can't buy ads, we can't do that kind of stuff."

Natural Resources

A very important key to Everdale's success has been that they are able to use the land they are on without having to purchase or lease it. Rather, it is held in trust by Everdale Place, and loaned out with no charge. "We're very lucky to have this land" notes Johnson.

Financial Resources

The CSA shares generate some income, and some educational program costs are offset at least partly by small fees, but the bulk of Everdale's work is financed through grant funding from foundations such as Heifer, Trillium and Metcalf, and private donations. Johnson explains: "We do a lot of grant writing, and then have individual donors. We do some events, but it's mostly grants and donors. That takes up a good chunk of my time, and I have another woman who works on it with me." He goes on to note that "stewarding donors is important, inviting them here to get them to see what's happening. I find…if they get here and they see kids here…they can see what happens and how transformative it is. You can tell them and they get it, but when they see the kids, it's like 'ah, there you go', or you meet the interns and see how excited they are, and the learning they've gone through, it's really nice. So we try to get them to come for a farm lunch, to connect with the place."

Community/Social Resources

Building community connections is a big part of what Everdale does. For example, a wall of photos in the farm shop provides profiles of CSA members and Everdale staff and volunteers as a way of introducing people to each other. In the words of Johnson: "It's about seeing who we are, what we do, as members of a community. So you can say, 'I rub shoulders with you every week', and now I see you're a graphic designer, or something, and people get to know each other like that. Our community food hub idea is kind of like that, connecting people, doing activities to get people congregating."

When it comes to organizational networking, Everdale works closely with local school boards, and educational institutes such as Sanford Fleming College, where Dandy teaches. It also participates in Taste Real and the Guelph-Wellington Food Round Table, donates food to the East Wellington Food Bank, and worked with Guelph-Wellington Local Food to develop a funding proposal for a food hub project focusing on new immigrants and social justice. For Johnson, that kind of networking "is huge for all of us."

Policy and Program Resources

Everdale gets no direct support from government sources. However, both Johnson and Dandy notice that "OMAFRA is starting to get what the local food movement is." Part of OMAFRA's perceived new recognition for the work of places like Everdale is because it is becoming increasingly clear that the local food movement is "not just a blip" or "something cute", but rather a sustaining, viable movement, full of success stories. On the other hand, Everdale has also evolved, for example by introducing a business planning course.

Desired Assets

The organization would like to achieve sustained funding. It also sees developing closer connections with faith communities, and potentially acquiring accreditation for some of its programs as useful future assets. In broader terms, Everdale would like to see OMAFRA provide some substantial support for the development of local food hubs, for example by potentially creating a pool of money that could be used to fund projects that would be vetted by an overseeing committee.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

Dandy explains that "the main challenge is financial. There is no shortage of other support. The ideas we're developing and that other people are bringing to us from the community are great ideas, and they make sense in every way except financially, because they essentially challenge the current financial system, so it's no surprise that there's no money in what we do…" A related challenge (that both Johnson and Dandy are quick to point out is also an opportunity) is the current explosion of new local food projects, as everyone is competing for very limited amounts of funding.

The main way that Everdale confronts the challenge is to make it clear what niche they serve (i.e. agriculture-related education) and why it is important. "We really try to focus on communicating what we do" explains Johnson, "so that's educating kids to be future consumers, getting young kids learning about food and farming and sustainability, and the other part is training farmers and getting them farming." Getting donors out to the site is essential, and collaborative proposals – such as the one recently submitted with Guelph-Wellington Local Food – are also a useful strategy.

Other challenges include high land prices, which make it challenging for Everdale internship graduates to start their own farms, and high municipal taxes for new buildings on-site.

Successes

There are too many individual success stories of people impacted by their experiences at Everdale to tell them all in this report. One of many examples provided by Johnson: "One of our interns last year was someone who had visited as a kid, and his parents had been part of the CSA, and then he did the internship, and now he's going to chef's school." In another case: "There was this woman, and she was working on Bay Street, and she always wanted to farm, so she came to volunteer for a month, and ended up staying five months, quit her job, bought a farm, and took our planning course, and now she's helping administrate that planning course." Johnson cannot say enough about how important these – and other – individual stories are, or about how excited CSA members are when the season starts, and how rewarding it is to be a staff member at Everdale.

In more concrete terms, Everdale feeds more than 300 people, and its programs have educated countless students, and trained 40 currently practicing organic farmers. They have also provided support to groups in other parts of the province seeking to develop sustainable food system programing, and they have made some inroads with government bodies such as OMAFRA in terms of achieving recognition for the local food movement. After years of work, and a trend towards ever higher levels of professionalism, Dandy notes that "now when we go to [OMAFRA], or go to the Agricultural Management Institute, and say we have this business planning course, and it's for people who are new entrant farmers who have never farmed before they don't just say 'Are you kidding me, that's a joke', they say 'we know about those people, we've heard about those people, and we feel that we want to connect with them somehow, because right now our policies and programs don't connect with those people, so tell us more'."

Relevance

For Johnson, "it is really important to get other organizations across the province doing similar work [to that of Everdale], because 40 farmers is great, but we're not going to do everything with 40 farmers."

When it comes to thinking about how the Everdale experience could be relevant to others, one of the main messages is its focus on the positive, and on demonstrating success. At Everdale, Johnson explains the work is not just about critiquing a system that doesn't work. Instead "we're talking about how to make things better, and people come here and feel like there is some hope." Offering tangible success stories could also be important when it comes to influencing actors such as OMAFRA. Dandy notes that "OMAFRA really responds when you can give a case study of Joe farmer, or Jane farmer who did this or that, they light up."

The sustained success of Everdale, as well as the flurry of activity around new local food projects, helps to demonstrate that, in the words of Dandy: "The local food thing is not just a flash in the pan…It's based on so much rational analysis of the world at large, it's becoming an undeniable phenomenon, that is not just a cute thing…like 'oh wouldn't it be nice if we could all eat food that's grown a block down the road'. Well not only would it be nice, but it's actually essential, based on every benchmark you can think of, whether it's environmental or financial or social or whatever, it's essential that we do that."

Case Study 2: Waterloo Region Neighbourhood Market Initiative

Location: Waterloo Region

Interviewees: Sanjay Govindaraj (Waterloo Region Public Health), Judy Maan Miedema (Waterloo Region Public Health), Mary MacKeigan (Opportunities Waterloo Region), Karl Kiefer (City of Cambridge Ward Councillor), Pauline Faul (Preston Market Volunteer/Treasurer), Sariah Rattana-Middleton (Preston Market Coordinator), Barbara Paul (Old Chicopee Market Coordinator), Karen Taylor-Harrison (Highland-Stirling Community Group Administrator), Laura Callum (Community Nutrition Worker), Joanne DeSouza (Mill Courtland Community Centre Coordinator)

Initial interview (Sanjay Govindaraj and Judy Maan Miedema only): July 5, 2011
Site visits: August 24 and 25, 2011 (Erin Nelson)

Overview

In 2006, Region of Waterloo Public Health led a food system planning process that included consultation with a wide variety of community stakeholders. One of the resulting recommendations was to develop markets for fresh produce in neighbourhoods where access was limited due to either geographic or economic factors. Public Health partnered with Opportunities Waterloo Region – an organization dedicated to poverty reduction – and obtained a grant from the Lyle Hallman Foundation, which allowed for the opening of two pilot project markets in 2007 and another three in 2008. These

markets sourced food from the Elmira Produce Auction, and sold it at a slight mark-up in the neighbourhood markets.

Today, three markets continue to operate – two in Kitchener and one in Cambridge. Public Health maintains a connection to the markets, but has largely stepped back in terms of its involvement, leaving management in the hands of neighbourhood organizations. In Kitchener, produce is now sourced from Jay West (a local food broker), with a number of other vendors selling processed foods, while at the Cambridge market the majority of the vendors are now farmers engaging in direct sale. The primary goal of all three markets remains to increase the accessibility of fresh, nutritious, local foods to marginalized populations (including low income community members and senior citizens); another main goal is to ensure support for area farmers.

The markets range in size. The smallest has entirely volunteer vendors and serves an average of approximately 60 consumers/week, while the largest has between 12-15 vendors engaged in direct sale of their products and sees an average weekly traffic of approximately 600 community members. In addition to the buying and selling of food, the markets also have community nutrition workers who help teach consumers how to prepare the food they buy in a healthy way (e.g. by providing recipes and samples of prepared meals) and performers who provide music and entertainment. They also sometimes host special events, such as a competition in which neighbourhood restaurants competed in a taste-off using recipes made with market products. To increase affordability, market vouchers are provided to pregnant women who participate in the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program [1] and people served by Community Outreach Workers[2].

Human Resources

Each neighbourhood market is coordinated by a part-time staff person who is employed for the market season. Volunteer support is a much greater part of market operations, even in the case of paid staff. In addition to the coordinators, a small number of staff hours are provided by people who are able to incorporate market activities into their positions – for example, a Salvation Army employee who serves as the Community Nutrition Worker at one market, or a City of Kitchener Community Resource Centre employee who is able to do some market support work.

The most important human resource for the market work has come from volunteer hours, on the part of paid staff such as the aforementioned coordinator, and also by people who are not paid at all. Each market has approximately 12-15 core volunteers, who fill the

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[1] The Canada Prenatal Health Program is for pregnant women who want to have a healthy baby, but may be financially disadvantaged, new to Canada, or socially isolated. Program participants attend weekly meetings that provide opportunities for social interaction with other pregnant women, free childcare bus fare, education about healthy pregnancies, nutrition and cooking, a healthy snack, and a free bag of groceries.

[2] Community Outreach Workers are funded through Social Services and work with individuals, households, and groups to see that basic needs are met and to build on and develop capacity and new skills. They provide information and connect them to community services as needed and are located at 25 community centre sites across Waterloo Region.

roles of vendors, organizational committee members, and do other necessary tasks, such as set-up and take-down on market days.

The role of the business vendors who participate in two of the three markets is another important human resource, and coordinators of both markets note that, so far, no vendors have left the markets. As one explains: "They like the atmosphere here, that's what everybody says to us."

Physical Resources

Each of the three markets relies on space provided free of charge by the City of Kitchener and City of Cambridge (in two cases, community centre parking lots, and in the third a public park). Other market necessities, such as tables and tents, have been acquired through a combination of donations and purchases made with grant funding.

Financial Resources

Small amounts of money for the markets have been provided by, for example, the City of Cambridge, Together for Health, TD Friends of the Environment, United way of Kitchener/Waterloo, and the Preston BIA,); however, the main financial resource for the markets to date has been funding from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation, which provided start-up money, as well as some follow-up funds to pay for, among other things, part-time coordination staff at each market. The Hallman funding proposals have been submitted over the years by Public Health. Because that organization is attempting to decrease its direct involvement in the project, it is likely that future funding will have to come from other sources.

Community/Social Resources

The community and social resources that have been mobilized around this project are perhaps the most important element of its success to date. So many community partnerships have been developed as the work has progressed that it would be impossible to outline them all here. Some key community collaborators and leaders – in addition to Waterloo Region Public Health and Opportunities Waterloo Region, who initially spearheaded the project – include the Preston Business Improvement Association, St Clements Parish, Grand View Baptist, Langs farm Village association, Alan Reuters Seniors Center, Highland Stirling Community Group, Mill Courtland Community Center and Centerville Chicopee Neighbourhood Association, the City of Cambridge, City of Kitchener, Waterloo Region Social Services, Mosaic Counseling and Family Services, The Working Center and the Salvation Army. These organizations have worked together to, among other things, provide the markets with community nutrition workers, volunteers, in-kind donations including phones, tables, office space, storage space, and staff hours, and the use of charitable organization status for money management.

Policy and Program Resources

It would be impossible to overstate the role that Waterloo Region Public Health has had in the development and implementation of the neighbourhood market initiative. Waterloo Region Social Services has also provided assistance, as its Community Outreach Workers have distributed market vouchers to vulnerable populations that can be redeemed for

market products. The markets were also the beneficiaries of a Health Innovation award given out by the provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

In spite of those examples of assistance however, the markets do not have any significant long term, sustained support or access to resources through government policies or programs.

Desired Assets

The main desired asset identified by people involved in all three markets was increased – and sustained – funding, particularly to pay for year-round market coordination, but also for items such as refrigeration units, and for more programming, for example around nutrition and health-promotion. The two locations that do not currently have farmers involved in direct sale would also like to develop closer relationships with local producers, though they note that this will be challenging because their markets are so small. One final important desired asset is increased partnerships, as well as the maintenance of existing collaborative relationships. For example, it would be useful to bring the YMCA and Immigrant Services into the project.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

One of the main challenges facing the neighbourhood market initiative is "bridging the affordability gap" to make the markets accessible to the target population – low income or otherwise vulnerable community members. This has been particularly challenging as there has been equal valued placed on the goal of increasing access to those with low incomes with a desire to support local farmers by ensuring they are paid fairly for their work. As one person involved in project coordination puts it: "You want to bring fresh and locally grown fruits and vegetables to the community, and especially to low income people…but at the same time you're also trying to pay the farmer fair value, and if we have to become self-sustaining, we have to make a profit. So how do we sell so that we can support people of low income…but also farmers?" One part of the answer has been the voucher program, mentioned above, which provides gift vouchers in 5$ denominations that can be redeemed for market goods.

Complying with public health standards around food safety, dependence on good weather, ensuring that the supply available meets people's basic needs, and getting enough local consumers to attend the markets have been other challenges. The coordinator of the smallest of the three markets notes they get 35-75 people per week: "You don't want to do it unless you have people coming…so the promotion is huge…We try to educate people when they come. We have recipes to give them, to tell people what to do with the vegetables. But the key is, we can only do that education if they come…Our biggest thing we're doing on that is more signs and word of mouth, and every year is getting better as far as numbers."

Successes

The markets have been very successful at increasing access to healthy local foods, particularly for the elderly and low income people. In the opinion of one person closely associated with the project since its beginning, the biggest success has been "exposing people in the community to fresh fruits and vegetables, and promoting the whole local

thing." Not only are people accessing good food, but as a representative of Opportunities Waterloo Region points out, "people are learning how to cook with the food too."

Equally, if not more important, has been the community-building impact of the markets. A Cambridge City Council member who sits on one of the market organizing committees explains that "it's not just a health thing, it's a social thing." Everyone seems to concur. One market coordinator suggests that "we don't just want to be a farmers' market, we want to be a part of the community", and another notes that "the huge thing…is that it brings people together…I live in an apartment building three doors down and everybody can't wait for the market." The bringing together of people through market participation has added benefits, as it helps them access resources they might not otherwise have discovered. A community centre staff person finds it "nice to see all the people coming in who had never been here before, and they come for the market, but find out about our programs", and an Opportunities Waterloo Region representative points out that "relationships are so important, because that helps lead people to other supports and services, and it strengthens peoples' whole social network."

Relevance

One of the lessons that can be taken from this project is the importance of having a strong champion to push an initiative forward in its early years. "It's time consuming at first" explains one of the project co-founders "to get something like this going, and it took a lot of support from Public Health at the beginning, not just the first year, but the first few years."

While an early champion is key, it is also essential for that actor or actors to develop community buy-in and build strong, lasting partnerships with members of different sectors. An Opportunities Waterloo Region representative suggests that one of the earliest advocates for the project was "a master at community engagement and community development…there has to be that person…to build that relationship with business, with government, with non-profits…it takes a servant kind of leadership to do this kind of work…you don't take credit…you bring people up, and then you step behind."

Funding, particularly in the early years, is also essential for success. As the Waterloo initiative seeks to become less dependent on external funding sources, one potential strategy forward is a vision to eventually take revenues from markets that are profitable and invest them into the markets that are struggling to break even. That kind of model would take a lot of work however, "and require a lot of business planning...and you have to ask how many you can balance…do you need three for-profit markets for every two that are just maybe breaking even, or what is the balance? We need more of that kind of planning" explains one person involved in the project.

Regardless of what happens with funding in the future, the high levels of community buy-in and participation that have been achieved in Waterloo Region have created a sense that, even if funding is discontinued, the project will continue. One early organizer explains that "it has reached a critical mass now, so I don't think it will end, even if the funding ends." A community group administrator agrees, noting that she recently

discussed the possibility of an end to external funding with her Board Chair, who responded: "I don't care. We'll find a way to fund it."

Case Study 3: Herrle's Country Farm Market

Location: St. Agatha
Website: http://www.herrles.com/

Interviewees: Trevor Herrle-Braun, Joanne Herrle-Braun, James Herrle, Michelle Herrle

Initial interview (Trevor Herrle-Braun only): July 11, 2011 (Erin Nelson)
Site visit (Joanne Herrle-Braun, James Herrle and Michelle Herrle): August 31, 2011 (Erin Nelson)

Overview

An engraved stone at the entrance to the parking lot of Herrle's Country Farm Market notes that the Herrle Homestead was originally established in 1858. Since then, generations of Herrles have grown crops – primarily sweet corn – in Waterloo Region. During the first half of the 20th Century, the Herrles brought their production to the Kitchener Farmers' Market. Then, in 1964, Howard and Elsie Herrle began selling goods at the farm gate. The popularity of the farm gate sales grew quickly and, eventually, the family stopped attending the Kitchener Farmers' Market and began to focus almost exclusively on farm-based retail, opening their first on-farm store building in 1988.

Today, the farm and market operation is managed by Howard and Elsie, along with their three grown children (Karen, James and Joanne) and their spouses (Michelle and Trevor). The various plots of land they farm total 250 acres, and the primary crop remains sweet corn, though a wide variety of other fruits and vegetables are also produced. In addition to what they grow themselves, the Herrles also source goods from a number of area farmers for sale in their retail space. In order to extend seasonal availability, and the variety of their supply, the family does source from a small number of American growers; however, they place a strong emphasis on promoting local food, grown within a 100 mile radius of their farm. The majority of goods sold are fresh, though they also offer a selection of processed products, including baked goods and preserves. The market is a seasonal business, open from June to October 31 each year.

Since the beginning of their on-farm sales, in 1964, Herrle's motto has been "Freshness makes the difference", and that attitude permeates all aspects of the operation, from the family's own production, to their decisions about what products to source from other producers, and how to store and market the goods they sell. For example, customers are informed by signage throughout the store of the origin of each product. This kind of consumer-friendly information does not end with product labeling, but extends to educational displays on the farm history, the benefits of local production, and nutrition. Indeed, keeping consumers informed, both through displays and personal contact and

communication, is an important priority for the Herrles, as is maintaining a family feeling and sense of pride in their work. As Joanne Herrle explains: "We are family owned and operated…We strive to be people of integrity, and to run our business the same way."

Human Resources

The backbone of Herrle's Country Farm Market is the human resources provided by the family members involved in the operation. Now 81, Howard Herrle still works 60 hour weeks, and his wife Elsie regularly attends the Elmira Produce Auction, among other activities. Eldest daughter, Karen, manages the company's accounts, while her brother James holds the position of Farm Director, and sister Joanne runs the bakery and organizes scheduling. James' wife, Michelle, is primarily responsible for human resources, and Joanne's husband, Trevor, is involved in production, retailing and promotion. Michelle explains that each family member has carved out a niche role for themselves, engaging in a broad range of activities that are well-suited to their unique personalities and abilities. None of them possess formal training in agriculture or business, but have amassed a wealth of practical experience over their years of work, and have supplemented that experience with extensive reading and participation in courses and workshops.

In addition to family members, Herrle's employs approximately 50 market staff, and 30 field workers on a seasonal basis. Human resources manager Michelle notes that her family is very proud of its staff return rate of 80%, which she suggests is reflective of Herrle's emphasis on treating staff well. For example, they organize events, outings and parties for employees – "small incentives to keep them excited about their work, and connecting with one another" – because they recognize that "an organization or business is only as good as the team that supports them." The Herrles also conduct performance appraisals, and meet with staff members to try and ensure that they are able to grow over their time with the business, and find work that is meaningful to them.

Physical Resources

In addition to 250 acres of farmland, and the equipment required to work it, the main physical resource involved in the operation is the market building. First built in 1988, an addition was added in 1996, and another in 2005. All investment in physical resources for the business has been made by re-investing profits, with the Assistance of Farm Credit Corporation (FCC).

In terms of advertising, Herrle's has a website, which includes a blog, as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts. They are also featured on Foodlink's Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. However, word of mouth has been by far their most important marketing and communications strategy. As Joanne puts it, "satisfied customers are what we rely on."

Financial Resources

Herrle's Country Farm Market is financed by continuous re-investment of the profits made by the business.

Community/Social Resources

When it comes to community and social resources, by far the most important thing for Herrle's is its loyal customer base. Michelle stresses that "our community has supported us amazingly well", with families passing on the tradition of shopping at Herrle's over generations, and promoting the business actively amongst friends and neighbours. Joanne adds that a Herrle family member is almost always available at the market to talk to customers, answer questions, or provide information, and that helps maintain strong relationships. "We know many of our customers" she says, "and are available to them. They appreciate that."

In addition to loyal customers, Herrle's has benefited from relationships with the Farm Fresh Marketing Association, which Joanne points out provided the family with "a wealth of knowledge", particularly in the earlier days of their growth, and with Foodlink Waterloo. With Trevor sitting on the Foodlink board, the entire family agrees that the organization is an active promoter of local foods in the community, which inevitably helps the business.

Finally, Herrle's has built connections with local area schools, offering fall tours for students, they donate produce to the Waterloo Region Food Bank, and they do a fair amount of business (primarily buying, but also selling) with the Elmira Produce Auction.

Policy and Program Resources

Although government policies and programs have not been a key factor in the development of Herrle's Country Farm Market, James acknowledges that the work done by Waterloo Region to promote local food has certainly been helpful in terms of encouraging people to seek out options for purchasing from local producers. Herrle's also takes advantage of the federal AgriInvest program, and in the past, has participated in the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program (CAIS). They have also received funding from the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) and the Environmental Farm Plan for environmental initiatives such as erosion control and tree-planting.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

The Herrles tend to focus much more on successes and opportunities than on challenges, but one thing they do note has constrained development has been municipal zoning regulation that is prohibitive to on-farm retail, particularly when it comes to larger-scale operations such as theirs. James explains that, in the township, "there is a preference for a small-scale, picnic table at the end of the road type of on-farm sale, but you can't make a living at that." The issue became particularly important in 2005, when the family built the most recent addition on their market building. At the time, zoning regulations dictated that none of the new space could be used for retail. While the added room for storage has been useful, the business has grown so quickly over the last 10 years that expanding the retail space is becoming increasingly necessary. The main strategy for overcoming this challenge has been maintaining open communication with local officials; however, James notes that, when the time comes to apply for a new addition, "it's going to get pretty sticky whether or not we'll get what we're looking for."

Another challenge is presented by the cheap produce available at large-scale retailers such as Walmart. While some products sold at Herrle's are priced comparably, it is impossible to compete with the pricing of so-called loss leaders. For example, James explains that Walmart can sell peaches for $2 per basket, and feature sweet corn at a price three times less than what it sells for at Herrle's because they can afford to lose money on those items. However, he adds that "there is going to be a huge difference in quality." Indeed, according to Michelle, customers at Herrle's rarely – if ever – complain about price, and are instead far more likely to comment on quality. In Michelle's words: "What we hear most of the time is 'this is so fresh'. We hear that countless times a day." Beyond simply providing a good product, taking the time to engage in conversation with customers, and to educate them about local food and its benefits, is key to ensuring long-term loyalty, and to combating the potential problem of higher prices.

Successes

In Joanne's opinion, Herrle's "big success is reaching a lot of people, educating them about agriculture, and making local food available for them." Michelle adds that "we're all about freshness, and being a welcoming place, with a nice atmosphere…and we have really great staff." The strong feeling of attachment to the market on the part of consumers – that amounts to an almost emotional connection – is a big part of why they have been able to serve an estimated 100 000 customers this year, many of whom might come to buy corn, but end up leaving with a wide variety of other high quality, primarily nutritious goods as well.

Relevance

James suggests that so many small things have contributed to the overall success of Herrle's Country Farm Market that it is impossible to pinpoint exactly what factor has been most important. Nevertheless, a number of issues were raised repeatedly. The first, reflected in the business motto, is quality and freshness. Important for maintaining that quality has been focusing attention on production of a niche crop – in the Herrles' case sweet corn – and supplementing the retail operation by sourcing from farmers who have their own expertise in other crops. In James' words: "We grow what we grow well, and source from other farmers who grow what they grow well." Joanne points out that being willing to pay a fair price to get top quality produce from other farmers has also been essential.

The quality of the goods for sale helps contribute to customer loyalty; however, the Herrles do not rely on the produce to speak entirely for itself. Instead, they work actively to cultivate and maintain close relationships with their clients, offering them a number of opportunities to become educated about the benefits of a local food economy. Customers also genuinely appreciate seeing the face of the farmer that produces their food, so maintaining the family-run feel of the business has been highly beneficial. "There is always a family presence in the market" explains James, "from open to close, so there is a connection."

Another important piece of advice that the family would offer to anyone trying to build a similar operation is to grow slowly. As Joanne puts it, in their case, the business started on a very small scale, and has been built through "years and years of hard work, and

taking some small risks, and big risks too. It has just been a very gradual thing." Expansion has been based on conducting yearly evaluations of what is working and what is not, and assessing market trends. For example, when it became clear that time-saving was a priority – particularly for female consumers – Herrle's began to offer quick and easy menu planning ideas that were accompanied by prepared shopping lists. They have also gradually built their supply to include all the products that someone would need to make a summer meal, including meat and dairy. That way, they ensure that customers do not have to visit another grocery store after attending the market.

In spite of the importance of everything mentioned above, James acknowledges that "you can't discount location. We could do all the same things we're doing, and be 15 minutes farther away, or even 5 minutes farther away on a back road, and we could never do it." The proximity to a large, relatively affluent, well-educated population has helped allow Herrle's to grow its client base, and living in a Foodlink region, has only further facilitated that growth.

Finally, it is abundantly clear that the Herrles love what they do, something that Trevor points out is key to their ability to be innovative and successful. "To see the joy and happiness on peoples' faces when they enjoy something you've produced" he says, "that's why we love what we do."