

Report on the Role of Farmers Markets in our Community

To: Sheridan Graham, Chair Sustainable Peterborough

From: Dawn Berry Merriam, Co-chair of the Future of Food & Farming Working Group

November 30, 2017

Background:

The Future of Food & Farming Working Group has recognized and discussed the importance of supporting farmers' markets for the important role they play in the local food system. Over the past six years we have documented the many elements of a local food system through our research and consultations.

Our community has been very concerned and confused about local issues concerning the Saturday Farmers' Market. As a result our working group held lengthy discussions on how best to ensure that the community interests that have emerged over the past few years in our work are recognized. At a recent Peterborough Chamber of Commerce Leaders' Lunch, a guest speaker from Nourish Food Marketing specifically pointed to the role of Farmers' Markets as a key location for the trialling of new products, and market research for new businesses. Farmers' Markets are also recognized as a best practice by the Ontario Municipal Knowledge Network.

We have prepared a letter (see below), but are unsure of next steps, including to whom it should be directed. We would appreciate recommendations and feedback from the Coordinating Committee on how we could proceed to ensure this messaging reaches the right ears in our community.

Draft Letter:

The 15 members of Sustainable Peterborough's Future of Food & Farming Working Group are concerned about the series of recent media reports and investigative journalism related to the Saturday Farmers' Market in Peterborough.

We represent a spectrum of interests in the food system in Peterborough City and County. We came together 5 years ago to work towards the community goals developed through the Sustainable Peterborough community consultation process, namely:

Our Goal:

We will feed ourselves sustainably with local, healthy foods by 2036.

Strategic Directions:

- Maintain adequate farmland availability to support our sustainable agricultural needs.
- Facilitate the production, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of local, healthy food.
- Encourage farmers to practice good environmental stewardship.

Since then we have held three food summits, and produced significant [research](#), including, for example, a survey on local food attitudes in our community. This survey, completed by more than 500 people in 2013, showed that most people in Peterborough look at “local food” as food that originates within our region.

In 2017, through a consultative process that included much of the research above, the Peterborough Board of Health approved a local food charter that was subsequently endorsed by the Working Group, the Coordination Committee of Sustainable Peterborough and was forwarded to municipal government for consideration in their official plan reviews. Many parts of the Food Charter illustrate the need for strong farmers’ markets as opportunities for buying local food and engaging with local farmers.

The Charter is attached.

We know that the number of farmers and the amount of farmland being actively used in our County are both decreasing, and have been for many years. Meanwhile, consumers are asking for more food grown locally. Our local farms, and new entrants to farming, should be actively encouraged in meeting this market demand and given every opportunity to succeed. Agricultural economic development is good for our community at every level and has significant spin-offs, as shown in the 2006 Agricultural Economic Impact and Development Study prepared for the County. The study showed that the simple output multiplier effect of agriculture exceeded almost all other industries in the region (page 5.6)

In light of the research available, and the sentiments of our community as expressed and documented over the years, we know that farmers’ markets are very important to our community. We are fortunate to have 7 markets that operate at different locations and for varying periods each year throughout the County.

For the general public, attending farmers markets provides an opportunity to directly support the economic success of our local farmers, and to spur the development and retention of other businesses (such as farm inputs and food processing) that serve our community. Farmers’ markets are playing an important role in carrying out the goals of the community, and are quite distinct from general grocery stores.

For this reason, the Future of Food & Farming Working Group is concerned about recent media reports that suggest the Saturday market – the oldest and largest in our community – may not be meeting community expectations and needs in prioritizing local farm success.

Managing a farmers' market is extremely challenging, and requires that the interests of many be considered in decision-making. The Market must indeed have a viable business plan. However, the community expects that a local farmers' market will, to the best of its ability

- Prioritize the success of local primary producers/farmers ie those growing food and other agricultural products for sale at the market, and who are therefore contributing to the local economy as part of the local food value chain in the County
- Prioritize the success of primary producers operating in the County, and then in the immediately surrounding area
- Ensure that young and new farmers feel included and are given the best possible “leg-up” by their colleagues at the market, and
- Ensure through every means possible that consumers, who are making the special effort to shop at the farmers' market rather than the grocery store, can confidently spend their dollars knowing what they are buying and where it came from.

To conclude, we hope that the Board of the Market will renew its commitment to those priorities in its administration and everyday operations, and to ensuring transparency and fairness for all of the businesses who are dependent on it for their livelihood. The application of best management practices will benefit everyone in our community.

If we can provide further information, please contact any member of the Working Group, and visit our [web pages](#).