

NOURISHING COMMUNITIES

Grey Bruce Local Food Project

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GREY BRUCE LOCAL FOOD PROJECT

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For this case study interviews were conducted in the Fall of 2014 and Winter 2015 with: Kim Clarke, Tourism Manager with Bruce County; Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer for Local Food Grey County; David Smith, Senior Planner at Bruce County; Jenny Amy, past Chair of the Grey Bruce Agriculture and Culinary Association; Guy Anderson, honey producer in Bruce County; and via email with Dr. Freeman Boyd, past Local Food Project Coordinator and Linda Reader, one of the founders of the Grey County Chef's Forum.

GREY BRUCE LOCAL FOOD PROJECT

RATIONALE

The Grey Bruce Local Food Project (LFP) is an example of a local government initiative geared towards enhancing local food opportunities. Through a partnership between two neighbouring rural counties (Grey and Bruce), the LFP was instigated as an economic development opportunity directed by the two County's Councils. Ultimately, the LFP worked as an intermediary to help connect producers with local markets. In January 2013, the joint Grey Bruce LFP was discontinued; however, as of Fall 2014, both Counties continue to work together closely on various local food initiatives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HISTORY/FOUNDING

In 2007, the Counties of Grey and Bruce came together to initiate the LFP. The need for the LFP was identified in two studies (Building Bruce and the Agri-Food Strategy) that were conducted in 2005. David Smith, Senior Planner for Bruce County, who worked closely with the LFP, explained that these two studies identified that the counties of Grey and Bruce do not have a competitive advantage to attract a processing cluster, as such, pursuing those businesses was not the best way to spend their time or money. The two studies concluded that, although there is no easy answer to stimulating the agriculture industry in the region, a useful strategy could be to focus on existing resources and promote farm-gate/value-added products and activities. In that context, the overarching goal of the LFP was to improve the agricultural industry in the counties of Grey and Bruce through developing and enhancing local food opportunities (Smith, 2013).

The two Counties joint-funded the LFP, and representatives from Grey and Bruce worked together to hire a Local Food Coordinator to run the project. Dr. Freeman Boyd – a market garden and egg/poultry farmer from Grey County who holds a Doctorate in Agricultural Ethics –was hired for the initial position. Shortly afterwards, an assistant position was also created and was filled by Maria Weijs.

Funding to start the LFP was secured through the counties' levies. Kim Clarke, Tourism Manager with Bruce County, described the LFP as stable throughout its existence. Clarke explained, "Yeah, it was pretty stable. The salaries and project monies essentially came from the counties until the councils had a change of heart and decided to go their own ways." Each county contributed annually. This funding was leveraged from 2009-2011 with provincial grants from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) through the Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF), as well as other financial contributions and in-kind support from the local community future development corporations, the Bruce Federation of Agriculture, the National Farmers Union, Grey Bruce

Agriculture and Culinary Association, and Grey Bruce Farmers' Markets (Smith, 2013).

The funding for the LFP was run through Bruce County's accounts. As such, the LFP staff were employees of Bruce County working under direction of both Counties' councils. The LFP staff developed and presented their annual work program, based on the allotted budget, to Bruce County's Planning Department committee and to Grey County's Tourism Department committee.

From 2007 to 2012 the LFP was provided office space at three different locations in the two counties. These locations include Grey Bruce Public Health, at the Bruce County Headquarters in Wiarton, and at the Grey County Headquarters in Owen Sound. Smith explained, "we tried to keep them somewhere in the middle of the two counties so that their travel distance [wouldn't be as great] and for people to be able to see them if they couldn't get out."

Launched in 2009, the Foodlink Grey Bruce (FLGB) website was one of the initiatives of the LFP, and provides a listing of over 350 local direct sale producers, procurers, processors, retailers and farmers' markets. Modeled after Foodlink Waterloo, the goal of the website is to help connect consumers with food that is produced in the counties of Grey and Bruce. Clarke recalled attending Foodlink Waterloo meetings to learn more about what they were doing. She explained:

"There was a big movement in 2007 to try and get the Buy Local Buy Fresh brand/logo out across Ontario. I went to one or two meetings because they started [the slogan] and it was really their logo and they licensed it to us but [it was] also in Guelph, Chatman-Kent and I think somewhere down east by Ottawa and a couple of other areas...I thought...if they are trying to develop this regional local food brand and program it would be kinda great just to jump on from there."

In the initial stages of project development, representatives of Foodlink Grey Bruce collaborated closely with Foodlink Waterloo to establish and adapt their own regional version of the initiative.

GOALS/MANDATE

As mentioned above, the goal of the LFP was to improve the agricultural industry in the counties of Grey and Bruce through developing and enhancing local food opportunities (Smith, 2013). The program's specific objectives were:

- "To actively grow the demand for Grey Bruce local food through networking, promotion and marketing and through community and sector education and networking.
- To develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory of the local food network, both the supply side and demand side (restaurants, institutions, retail and other 'demand' side venues).

- To engage in a dialogue with local distributors and others capable of packaging/delivering Grey Bruce local food products within Grey/Bruce.
- To actively engage the institutional and restaurant sectors in the use of and promotion of local food.
- To partner with local organizations i.e., Grey Bruce Agriculture and Culinary Association and others, in the development, promotion and marketing of Grey Bruce local food” (Smith, 2013).

HOW IT WORKED

To accomplish these objectives, Boyd and Weijs divided their time as follows: 30% was devoted to website and listings; 27% to programs, services and outreach; 14% to working with project partners; 19% to media promotion, the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association and administration; and the remaining 10% to public speaking and special events (Smith, 2013).

As of 2012, the projects and responsibilities of the LFP included: maintaining, upgrading and promoting the FLGB website, including recruiting website listings; producer and retailer support programs; local food promotion (direct and seasonal); institutional support program; support and promotion of the Farmers’ Market Network; grocery store project; Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association support; and public speaking/special events.

ACTORS INVOLVED

Actors involved in the LFP included Grey County, Bruce County, the Local Food Project Coordinator Dr. Freeman Boyd and his assistant Maria Weijs. The LFP, and other staff of the counties’, worked closely with producers, farmers’ markets, community partners, institutions, grocery stores, and local associations to help connect local food producers to consumers.

SCALE OF THE PROJECT

In 2010 the project’s budget was \$106 000 (52% from Grey and Bruce Counties, 33% from OMIF, and 15% from other sources). Funding increased in 2011 to \$162 000 (74% from Grey/Bruce, 23% OMIF, and 3% other). In 2012, funding decreased to \$123 900, with the only source of funding that year coming from the Counties.

LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES IN GREY BRUCE AS OF FALL 2014

In January 2013, the Local Food Project partnership between Grey and Bruce ended. According to Smith, the primary reasons for discontinuing the partnership were:

1. The OMIF funding that had provided significant support to the project stopped; and

2. An economic development review completed in Grey county identified agriculture as a strategic area for investment, and this led to the decision for the County to hire a full-time staff person dedicated specifically to work in Grey.

Differences in geography also made collaboration on local food work challenging. Interviews with both Smith and Philly Markowitz, the Economic Development Officer for Local Food in Grey County, revealed that differences in the landscapes between Bruce and Grey counties lead to significant differences in the kind of farming that is practiced. Markowitz explained that the landscape in Grey County – which is located on the Niagara escarpment and characterized by rock, limestone aggregate, drumlins and moraine – lends itself to small-scale farms. In contrast, the landscape in Bruce County is ideal for larger farms, which tend to engage in commodity farming. Smith pointed out that “there has always been more ‘local food’ in Grey County than there is in Bruce. That is partly a reflection...of the farming types that is going on. We have a far more heavily commodity dependent agriculture in Bruce than they have in Grey just because of the landscape.”

Since the ending of the LFP in January 2013, both counties have continued to carry out work on local food projects with funding and direction provided by the councils of the two counties.

While the counties no longer partner directly on the LFP, as of late 2014 there were still many collaborative projects and initiatives focused on economic development through local food in the Grey Bruce region. For instance, both counties continued to work closely with each other and with community groups such as the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association, and the Foodlink Grey Bruce website was still being maintained. Clarke explained that the website would not have the impact it does if they had separated it by county. Markowitz noted that the Foodlink Grey Bruce website has value as “people are using it all of the time”. It is important to note that, at the time of the research, the Foodlink Grey Bruce website was under evaluation by the two Counties.

BRUCE COUNTY

In 2013 Bruce County dedicated \$87 000 to local food work, including employment of its own Local Food Coordinator (Smith, 2013); however, due to budget constraints this position was not renewed in 2014. Clarke mentioned that, while Bruce County does not have a full-time Economic Development Officer devoted to local food there is still a desire to see the sector grow, as “[a]griculture is our number one industry in Bruce County so, if we can do something to try and help out the sector, that is great.”

At the time of research, the majority of local food initiatives in Bruce County were housed in the Department of Planning and Development divided between Tourism and Economic Development staff. As of Fall 2014, approximately three to four staff members in Tourism and Economic Development were working on different local food projects, with work being done in consultation with County Council, Procurement Officers, Grey County, the Grey Bruce Agricultural and

Culinary Association, the local OMAFRA representative, producers, and vendors.

GREY COUNTY

Markowitz was hired in April of 2013 as the Grey County Economic Development Officer for Local Food. At the time of research, she was working closely with the other Economic Development Officers for Grey County, the Grey County Tourism Department, and her equivalents at Bruce County and, to a lesser extent, Simcoe County. In addition, Markowitz has consulted on various community-driven initiatives such as the Grey County Chef's Forum and the Five Star Food Hub. The 2013 fiscal year was atypical, as Markowitz was not hired until April. For 2014 the budget devoted to local food initiatives was \$22 000 exclusive of staff salaries.

IMPACTS/BENEFITS

The driving force behind local food initiatives in Grey Bruce is local economic development. Smith explained, "my approach to local food is simply this – more money in a farmers' pocket." As a leading sector in Grey Bruce the rate of return on agricultural products has a significant impact on the local economy and on community development. A gap analysis study conducted by Boyd in 2009 showed that in 2008 the average net on-farm income in Ontario ranged from -\$4 000 to \$11 000 per year. That same year, the average on-farm income in Grey Bruce was \$7 723, which Boyd acknowledges is an inflated number due to the inclusion of supply managed sectors of dairy and feathers. In the study Boyd (2009, n.p.) explains that "[m]any of the smaller and even some of the medium sized farms in Grey Bruce actually subsidize food production on their farms with their off farm income."

At the time of research, actual statistics regarding increases in local food sales as a result of the County's various initiatives were not available, and Clarke noted that they are currently lacking a good tool to monitor the outcomes of their efforts. That being said, Clarke commented, "[w]e have been talking and doing work in this field for about seven years now. It has been really great that even over the last seven years the popularity and the increase in the movement from a consumer perspective [that] local food has started to become a little bit more mainstream which is really great." In the past, Clarke explained, they have looked to the number of farmers' markets, the number of vendors at farmers' markets, the number of CSAs, and the number of FLGB listing to gauge their success.

In 2009, 12 farmers' markets were supported by the counties of Grey and Bruce (Boyd, 2009). Of these twelve, seven began operating in 2007/08 (Boyd, 2009). As of February 2015 there were 17 farmers' markets and 21 CSAs listed on the FLGB website. Markowitz, who maintains the FLGB website for Grey County, explained that the FLGB website is very valuable, making note of the web traffic it creates and the amount it is being used.

POTENTIAL FOR EXPANSION

In Grey Bruce, approximately \$1 out of every \$50 spent on food per person, per week is spent on food produced in Grey Bruce, Boyd explained. This equates to roughly 1-2% of food purchases, or \$150 000 of \$7.5 million (Smith, 2013). The Counties' local food initiatives are trying to increase this amount. For example,



[I]ncreasing local food sales to \$1.5 million per week would add \$4 million to the local economy, which would equate to roughly 10% of the current economy.

Boyd explained that both Counties have run a local food challenge that aims to increase weekly local food consumption from \$1 (2%) to \$10 (20%) per week. This would increase local food consumption in Grey Bruce

from \$150 000 to \$1.5 million per week. Given the local food multiplier of 1.4 - 2.6 (Meter, 2008 as cited in Smith, 2013) increasing local food sales to \$1.5 million per week would add \$4 million to the local economy, which would equate to roughly 10% of the current economy. Boyd acknowledged that a 20% increase of local food consumption may be out of reach, and suggested that a more realistic target would be to double existing local food sales.

INITIATIVES TO FACILITATE EXPANSION

As Smith pointed out, there is no easy solution to increasing local food consumption in Grey Bruce; however, as of 2014 the Counties were involved numerous initiatives, at various stages of implementation, attempting to address this challenge. These initiatives include, but are not limited to, working in partnership with the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association to help local restaurateurs increase their local food procurement; consulting with various community groups who are exploring developing food hubs to address distribution issues; partnering with Georgian College to develop a food safety regulation program for local food producers; promoting local food through local television appearances, radio, and print ads; maintaining an online network through the FLGB website; working with retirements homes and schools to increase local food procurement; and, from a tourism perspective, developing local value-added products. Some of these initiatives are community-driven, in which case the Counties played a more supportive role, while other initiatives were initiated and maintained directly by the Counties.

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

LIMITATIONS TO SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD

The greatest challenge for increasing local food sales in Grey Bruce is distribution. With a combined total population of 157 000 and total area of 8 582 square kilometres, the largest city in the area is Owen Sound, which has a population of 20 000 (Smith, 2013). This low population density makes it very difficult for producers to access sizeable markets. Clarke, Markowitz, and Smith acknowledged that it is a significant challenge for producers to be able to

distribute their products throughout Grey and Bruce without cutting excessively into their profit margins due to the lack of adequate market size. Clarke explained:

“It is an amazing bounty of food that we can produce here. Our problem is that we are really big and have such a low population that the economics to transport food from one place to another can be hugely expensive. So trying to get lamb from Wiarton to a restaurant Kincardine, if they don't have a big enough order, can almost cost the farmer more than it is worth to drive it there.”

Clarke further noted that the problem of distribution is slightly greater in Bruce County as the population is lower than Grey County and the land area is greater.

In both counties there has been significant discussion regarding how to address the issue of distribution. Smith explained that one of the original ideas behind the LFP was to explore the possibility of a food hub in which the cost of distribution could be shared amongst distributors. When it became apparent that the economic viability of a food hub to supply solely Grey and Bruce was low the project quickly shifted focus to explore other means of increasing local food consumption and production.

One way producers have addressed issues associated with distribution is to access other larger markets in Ontario. These markets include the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and other markets in Southwestern Ontario. The Grey County Chef's Forum's Food Hub is an example of an initiative that began in September 2014 to address distribution issues of local food sales. As of February 2015 “[d]emand from GTA and Toronto buyers [through the Chef's Forum's Food Hub] for locally sourced food found in Grey County is outstripping the production” explained Linda Reader, one of the founders of the Grey County Chef's Forum. As a result member farmers in Grey County are able to increase their production. Reader explained, “75% [of producers] had increased their output in 2014, 100% indicated they would be increasing production in 2015 according to our survey completed in October 2014”.

In Grey County the local food producers in the north end of the county have a completely different set of challenges and needs than those working in the south end, Markowitz identified. In the north end of Grey County, the population is much more seasonal and producers are further away from the larger markets in the GTA and Southwestern Ontario. This has a significant impact on their business viability.

Other challenges for local food sales in Grey and Bruce include increasing its accessibility in the supply chain; educating the public on what is local; navigating health and safety regulations and institutional red tape; and seasonality. Clarke describes the challenges associated with increasing the public's access to and knowledge of local food as follows:

“Continuing to promote what is available in our area is great. Creating access to food...doesn't change the shopping habits of people. I think that is a real challenge. People are used to going to the grocery store and

getting all their goods in one place...In general, if you can take local food to where people are and where people are already shopping as opposed to changing the way people already shop...then I think that the local food movement would be leaps and bounds further ahead...And I think a lot of it doesn't have to do so much with the availability of products. So if I look at my local grocery store, which is a Loblaws chain, I can purchase local honey, local maple syrup and local cheese and local dairy products through Gay Lea and Pine River cheese...but because of labeling restrictions and the competitive nature of shelving I don't know that it is local...You could increase the sale of local products that are already being distributed through major channels potentially just by telling people that it is local. I mean Foodland Ontario signage is great but if there was the ability to bring that down to a more local level that would be amazing. Access to local food in grocery stores is a big issues for us.”

To address these issues of access and consumer education, local food initiatives have focused on helping producers learn more about how they can distribute their products and on increasing connections amongst producers, processors, restaurateurs, retailers and consumers.

Markowitz explained that the LFP explored institutional food procurement and “found that the regulatory environment was so difficult and the fact that there wasn't a lot of flexibility around seasonality they found it virtually impossible to make inroads.” There was some success with seniors' homes in Grey County, Smith explained.

OTHER CHALLENGES

Another challenge Clarke identified for food producers in Bruce County was regulations around abattoirs and transportation. She explained that there is not an abattoir in the area with enough kill time available for local food producers, and transportation restrictions in relation to transporting produce and meat together is a real barrier.

STORIES FROM UP & DOWN THE FOOD CHAIN

GREY BRUCE AGRICULTURE AND CULINARY ASSOCIATION

The Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association is an association of farmers, distributors, retailers, restaurants, accommodation and tourism businesses, and individuals who are interested in promoting local regional food through networking, marketing and education (Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association, n.d.). Beginning in 2007, the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association has maintained a fairly consistent membership over the last seven years of 130 members, explained Jenny Amy, past chair of the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association. The Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association works closely with both Grey and Bruce Counties to develop programming and promote local food.

Amy identified that the association is unique in that it brings together the various local food actors that has led to a greater understanding of each actor's needs and challenges. Amy explained, "We talked about the possibility of working together to try and understand each others' needs and concerns better. That has been a huge piece of the work here because we are all small independent business people and you don't normally get an opportunity to cross your field line...So, learning as a restaurateur or as B&B owner that if you want six dozen eggs that week then you got to plan for it so that [the producer] can plan for it [has been very helpful]."

As of Fall 2014, the main local food initiatives that the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association engages in is an annual local food map. The map contains 102 listings of local food producers, retailers, wholesales, restaurants, bakeries, cooking schools, accommodations, and farmers' markets. The listings are predominately farm gate operations. The map has been very popular and producers have reported a 10% to 15% increase in sales that they have attributed to the map. Fifteen hundred maps are produced annually and distributed throughout Grey Bruce.

LAZY J RANCH

Guy Anderson, co-owner and operator of Lazy J Ranch in Kincardine, specializes in wildflower and clover honey. Anderson co-owns the business with his wife and four sons. As an active member in the local food economy, and member of the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association, the Andersons have been successful at marketing and distributing their products throughout the counties of Grey and Bruce. The Andersons maintain a small retail store in Kincardine. Their products are available online, in small retailers throughout Grey Bruce, and they have been successful at gaining access to larger chain grocery stores. Due to increasing annual surpluses of honey that are too large for the local economy, the Andersons rely on finding export markets. In the past the Andersons have exported their honey to the United States, China, and Denmark. Anderson estimated that 25% of their product is for local markets and 75% is exported. In Fall 2014, Anderson was facing new challenges due to increased bee mortality. Anderson attributed this to neonicotinoides and noted that he is seeing increased bee mortality during the planting season, during corn pollination, and after it rains when bees bring water back to the hive from the fields. As a result of increased bee mortality the Andersons have decided to send some of their bees to New Brunswick for the 2015 blueberry pollination. In regards to food hub feasibility for the Counties of Grey and Bruce, Anderson noted that there are three challenges that he has observed and they include:

1. Seasonality, due to the relatively short growing season in Ontario;
2. Creating an accessible food hub is an issue due to the large land area the counties cover; and
3. The low population density within the two counties.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE/NEXT STEPS

As of Fall 2014 it was apparent that there is no easy answer to increasing the sales of local food in the Counties of Grey and Bruce. As such, the counties have focused their local food initiatives on supporting various bottom-up, community-driven projects.

GEORGIAN COLLEGE FOOD SAFETY REGULATION COURSE

Markowitz has been working in partnership with Georgian College, Bruce County, and Simcoe County to develop curriculum for a food safety regulation course to address a need expressed by county constituents. The course began being offered in November 2014 for a \$60 fee and includes 12-hours of in-class time in addition to online resources and simulations. Topics covered include: the nature of food safety regulations; basic food handling procedures, including Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures; an overview of food safety regulations; and an overview regulatory bodies' roles and responsibilities. Participants also have access to online food safety simulations, in which they assume different roles, identify hazards, and explain how hazardous scenarios could be avoided. In addition, course participants will have access to nutritional analysis software to analyze the nutritional composition of their products for no extra fee. This is a significant benefit, Markowitz explained, as nutritional analysis typically costs \$600.

GREY BRUCE AGRICULTURAL AND CULINARY ASSOCIATION CHEF MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

In Fall 2014, Grey and Bruce Counties, in partnership with the Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association, were in the midst of beginning a Chef Mentorship Program, which was initiated to help local restaurateurs and chefs navigate the local food system in Grey Bruce. One of ideas behind starting the Chef Mentorship Program was the acknowledgement that local restaurants are an excellent venue for introducing people to local food, and offer good market opportunities for local producers. Clarke explained, "We have tried to become the distributor, we have tried to connect people directly through the website. We have done a number of different things and nothing has really worked yet." A chef born in the area, who moved away, and is now returning to Toronto, agreed to lead the Chef Mentorship Program. Clarke explained, "He is a real advocate for the local food movement and practices." The goal of the Chef Mentorship Program is to share experiences and ideas with local chefs and restaurateurs regarding how to reduce some of the hurdles associated with procuring local food. Topics they hoped to address included, but were not limited to, helping chefs plan and communicate their needs to local farmers, as well as providing suggestions to chefs and restaurateurs to help them adjust to higher food costs associated with local food procurement. Markowitz explained that part of the program will be "setting up direct relationships so that the growers know exactly what the restaurants want and can grow that for them for the following year...ultimately the idea is to have those restaurants become eligible for Feast

Ontario which requires 25% local [food] procurement.” The first cohort of the mentorship program will include 12 chefs/restaurateurs.

RELEVANCE BEYOND THE CASE STUDY ORGANIZATION

The Counties of Grey and Bruce are leaders in Ontario’s agricultural sector. Challenges with distribution that are associated with low population density and large land area have posed the greatest difficulty for local food sales for these two rural counties. At the time of writing, many local producers continued to rely on larger markets, both within Ontario and abroad, to turn a profit, with local food consumption at just 1-2%. Local food efforts have focused on attempting to increase local food consumption. Due to the nature of challenges in the region, bottom-up, community-driven initiatives have become the focus of most local food efforts.

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