

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY AGRI-BUSINESS BRIEF



PROUDLY  
NORTHUMBERLAND

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## Action Plan Background

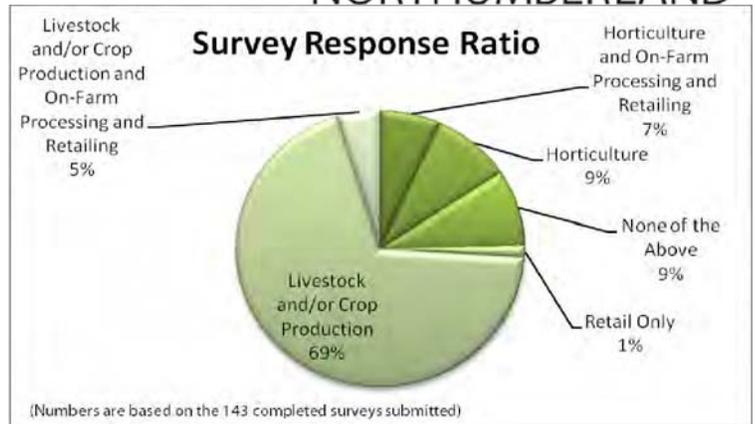
The Northumberland County Agricultural Action Plan was developed in partnership with the agriculture industry to strengthen the local agriculture sector.

Northumberland County recognizes that farming involves specialized skills developed by tradespeople to support agriculture-based businesses. To remain a solid economic driver, farming needs more than just a dedicated land base. With an aging population, if the skills local farmers have developed over centuries are not fostered and passed-down to younger generations, supported through education, economic development and fair environmental, business and land policies, agriculture in Northumberland County, Ontario, and eventually Canada, will become extinct – regardless of the amount of land designated solely for its use.

The Northumberland County Agricultural Action Plan steering committee included representation from Northumberland County Council and M.P.P. Lou Rinaldi's Northumberland Quinte-West Agricultural Advisory Committee, local farmers, and staff representation from Northumberland

## The Community Speaks

Northumberland County's Economic Development and Tourism Department utilized the services of Mallot Creek Strategies Inc., and the support offered by the Province of Ontario's Rural Economic Development Program and the Government of Canada's Eastern Ontario Development Program, to develop the Agricultural Action Plan from a series of strong recommendations with grass-roots support from the industry and community it aims to serve. Input garnered through two-way communication channels provided first-hand insight into the industry's needs and opportunities within Northumberland County. The frank input of the industry led to the development of the Regional Vision as stakeholders worked together to find ways to champion Northumberland County's agriculture sector. The 'best practice' principals of the 2007



County and the Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation.

Agri-business stakeholders were engaged in numerous interviews, consultations, and workshops. A key assessment tool for the project; a survey, was distributed through agriculture organizations, various farm-based networks and local media. Over 900 surveys were mailed directly to agri-business owners with assistance from local chapters of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario and the National Farmers Union. Nearly 15% of Northumberland County's agriculture sector responded.

City of Kingston Agriculture Study by Clark Consulting Services were endorsed as the principals to form the basis of the Action Plan:

- develop a shared vision with shared actions to be undertaken by the agricultural industry and local government,
- encourage financially sustainable agriculture practices
- protect and support farmland value through public policy and programs,
- capitalize and market Northumberland County's unique agriculture strengths
- encourage the agricultural community to ally itself with consumers by creating a strong voice for local farming, food production and agri-businesses.

### Regional Vision

*"Together we will develop the opportunities that will enable our agricultural sectors and our rural communities to prosper."*

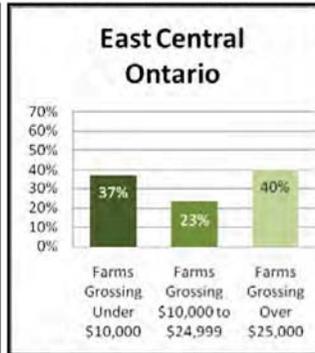
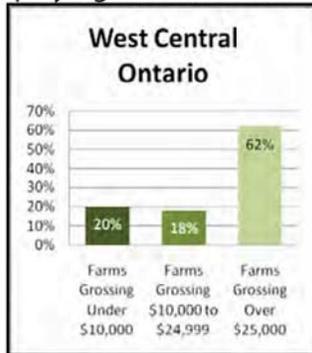
## Two Regions At-A-Glance

The Agriculture Sector in Eastern Ontario has been struggling for a number of years to compete with the highly successful agri-businesses of Western Ontario.

Northumberland County has an opportunity to be a leader in efforts to level the playing-field between eastern and western Ontario agri-business owners.

In the last 15 years, 17% of Ontario's agriculture enterprises have vanished. In Northumberland County we have seen over 30% of our agri-businesses close.

While the provincial average farm size has increased by slightly more than 36 acres, in Northumberland County, our farms have grown by an average of 40 acres since 1991. This data, when combined with our gross farm receipts, indicates that while the



agriculture sector in Northumberland is in transition, there remains a dedicated desire to preserve the foundation of farming and food production through adaptation and innovation.

Northumberland County, and our partners in Eastern Ontario, need to seek out new and innovative products like hemp, and value-added opportunities like "green" bio-alternative products, which can be produced, processed and distributed from our own fields and factories.

By exploring new economic development initiatives and developing new resources, we can help promote growth in a sector which has always played a vital role in our local economy.

## Value Chain Challenges

A value chain is a group of supply chain businesses working together to build a competitive advantages for products in response to market demands and new market opportunities.

Agricultural value chains can involve multiple transactions from the time the producer harvests the product (or in the case of livestock, ships the animal to the abattoir). Typically a product will change hands three or more times between processors, distributors, brokers, and wholesalers, before a retailer receives the goods.

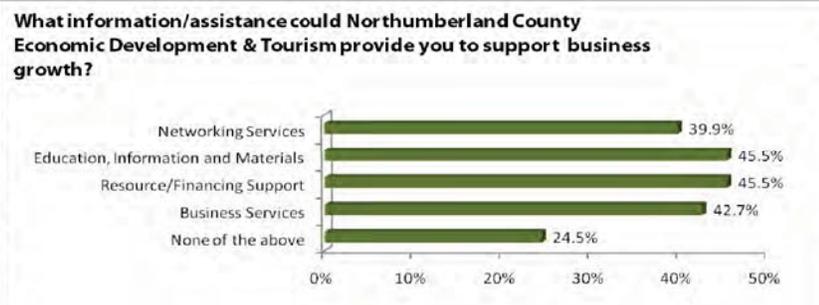
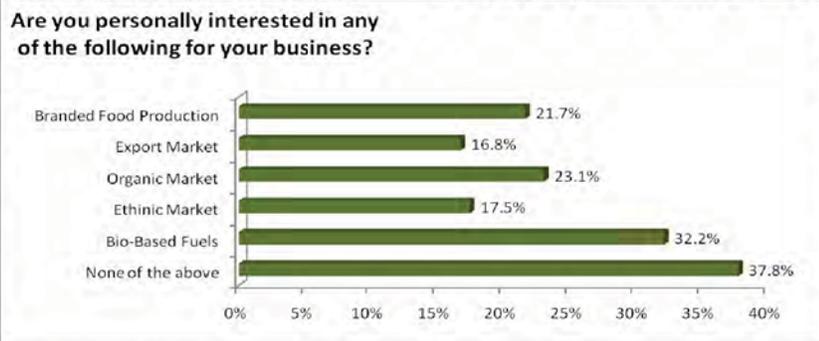
As processors like canneries and packagers close local facilities, businesses are forced to ship their goods farther, thinning their profit margins and forcing hard choices about the future.

## Industry Needs

Survey results and insights shared in four stakeholder workshops revealed the major agri-business needs of Northumberland. While 55% of survey responders indicated they had no current awareness of the agri-business support offered by the County's Economic Development Department, the majority of the respondents expressed positive

interest in a cross section of services including:

- Education & Information Sessions & Materials
- Resource & Financing Support
- Business Planning
- Feasibility Studies
- Market Research
- Networking opportunities and services to connect with potential business partners.

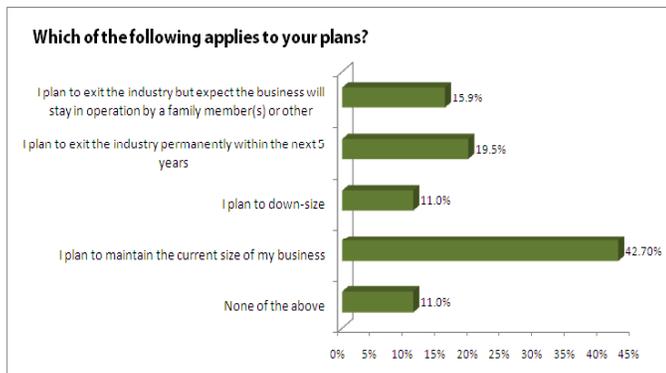


## Current Outlook

In 2006, 55% of the total land prepared for seeding in Northumberland used no-till practices (an innovative and environmentally beneficial cropping method,) more than any other county in Ontario.

County gross farm receipts in 2006 reflected an 2.13% increase from 2002, with 57% of Northumberland's farms grossing under \$24,999.

Changes in farm demographics are a concern as the county experienced a 6.6% drop in farm numbers between 2001 and 2006, a decrease of 32% total since 1991.



## Recommendations

Fundamental to Northumberland County's success as we respond to industry needs, and support the development of opportunities in the sector; is a partnered approach between Northumberland County Economic Development & Tourism and local agri-businesses. Partnerships will foster the commitment needed to rally interest and participation, embrace a plan of action, and implement strategies with dedicated resources and program support.

Following the Northumberland County Regional Review and Stakeholder Consultations, three major categories of recommendations were identified:

- i. **Actions to Support Agricultural Production and Consumer Marketing, including Education, Public Awareness, and Advocacy**
- ii. **Actions to Develop Bio-Product and Agri-Energy Opportunities**
- iii. **Actions to Improve Northumberland County's Rural Communities' Quality of Life, Community Leadership, and Labour Force**

## Actions to Develop Bio-Product and Agri-Energy Opportunities

### BIO-PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES

- Establish partnerships to develop successful bio-product industries which can utilize Northumberland County's agricultural resources to increase the use of by-products generated through traditional farm practices.
- Create partnerships with industry stakeholders to develop local "green" business opportunities, with the goal of establishing Northumberland County as a world leader in "Bio-Alternative" and "Green" Industries.

- Work with local building inspectors to ensure consistent interpretation of building code requirements as new construction materials comprised of agricultural biomass are introduced to the consumer mass-market.

### AGRI-ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES

- Identify opportunities to conserve, access, and create renewable energy for on-and-off farm agri-energy projects.

## Actions to Improve Northumberland County's Rural Communities' Quality Of Life, Community Leadership and Labour Force

### QUALITY OF LIFE

- Work with all levels of government to improve access to high quality healthcare through the use of Telehealth Ontario, and expand internet broadband access throughout Northumberland County to allow full access to all government e-services.

- Support agricultural-related community planning and development by strengthening the engagement of agri-business operators in the civic life as well as increasing the number of farmers and agri-business owners actively participating in local business organizations.

### COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

- Establish and support a Northumberland County Agriculture Advisory Committee to help prioritize county-led agriculture initiatives and help facilitate specific projects.
- Encourage policy-makers and government agencies to connect with agri-business owners by hosting an annual agricultural tour of Northumberland County.

### LABOUR FORCE

- Work in partnership with stakeholders to increase awareness of employment opportunities in the agriculture sector and to provide educational and technical training to meet industry needs.

# Actions to Support Agriculture Production and Consumer Marketing including Education, Public Awareness and Advocacy

## CONSUMER MARKETING INITIATIVES

- Expand the *Proudly Northumberland* program in 2009 by updating the Proudly Northumberland Farm Gate Guide, promote value-added opportunities for businesses such as delis, grocers and eateries selling local food.
- Work with agricultural industry stakeholders to identify specific sectors and products in Northumberland County which offer the greatest markets for diversification, growth and export marketing opportunities while also diversifying.
- Develop and support web-based marketing tools, a database of Proudly Northumberland products and their producers and suppliers. Work with the agriculture community to develop and maintain a database of agriculture services

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## EDUCATION

- Increase participation in 4-H and OMAFRA-led competitively priced technical and educational programs while pursuing investment in infrastructure for 4-H and OMAFRA leadership camps for youth.
- Offer strong support for agriculturally-based education, research and development. Expand agricultural education programming for non-farm audiences to promote a better understanding of agricultural issues and challenges.
- Assist in addressing the challenges that come with the expansion of suburban communities into rural areas, and increase support for agricultural initiatives within Northumberland County's urban and rural communities.
- Work with local farming organizations to develop and support opportunities to expand agricultural education programs in public and secondary schools through innovative and best-practices delivery models.

## AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION

- Work with livestock producers and other stakeholders to determine the feasibility of establishing a small-scale, niche, federally inspected abattoir facility in the County thereby decreasing shipping costs for producers in eastern Ontario, serving the "100 mile diet" market of the GTA and providing a source for locally grown Halal and Kosher options including but not limited to beef, lamb and goat meat.
- Develop business opportunity analysis tools to assist potential agri-business owners, and expand, strengthen and transform existing agri-business owners with the means to invest strategically in new opportunities and markets, or reposition current products.
- Develop and support web-based marketing tools, a database of Proudly Northumberland products and their producers and suppliers. Work with the agriculture community to develop and maintain a database of agriculture services throughout Northumberland County.
- Work with partners to improve access to large animal veterinary care and other agriculture support services throughout Northumberland County.

## PUBLIC AWARENESS

- Work with the Haliburton, Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPR) to strengthen consumer marketing of locally-grown foods in ways that highlight the health benefits of 'buy local' opportunities.
- Expand communication between HKPR and Northumberland agri-businesses to build producer-based value chains by supporting consistent and predictable interpretations of health regulations.
- Aid the efforts of local farm sector organizations to raise awareness about the importance of agriculture in the County and increase the public's understanding of issues confronting farmers and agribusinesses such as the need for regulations to allow livestock and grain producers to protect their operations from grazing predators.

## ADVOCACY

- In cooperation with the agricultural community, develop a communications strategy to increase the awareness and understanding of the public and policy makers, on the needs of agri-businesses when it comes to labour issues. Encourage all levels of government to develop a cost-share program to assist agricultural employers in providing housing, public transit, broadband and other infrastructure support to meet the needs of domestic and migrant farm labour.
- Endorse and support the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus in their efforts to encourage the Minister of Research and Innovation to become a strong advocate within the government to ensure that Ontario ministries are not implementing unnecessary regulatory barriers to new value-added products. Barriers implemented by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment have proven to be a significant obstruction for farmers pursuing new economic opportunities in the conversion of biomass to biofuels and other alternative energy markets.

- Work with the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus to develop programs and policies providing incentive for agricultural producers to undertake environmental stewardship programs when the program will negatively impact the agri-business (ex. by removing land from production or implementing new restrictions on use.)