

# The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole  
Planning and Economic Development  
May 9, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

## **2018 Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy Update and Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee Terms of Reference**

### **1. Recommendations**

1. Council receive the 2018 Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy update for information.
2. Council approve the Terms of Reference for the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee (Attachment 1).
3. This report be circulated by the Regional Clerk to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and local municipalities.

### **2. Summary**

This report provides Council with an update on the first year of implementation of York Region's [Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy](#) (endorsed by Council in October 2017) with an outlook of planned initiatives for 2019. This report also seeks Council approval of the Terms of Reference for the York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee (Attachment 1), formerly called the Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group.

Key Points:

- The first year of Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy implementation is on track with significant stakeholder outreach and engagement in 2018
- Successful collaboration is underway to support the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy action plan with a focus on education and awareness
- In 2018, 31 of the 45 Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy actions were either initiated or planned and four short-term activities completed
- 2019 agriculture and agri-food initiatives will strengthen stakeholder communication, collaboration and build capacity in the agriculture and agri-food industry
- The proposed Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee Terms of Reference aligns the focus of the Advisory Committee with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy

and makes the structure and operations of the Terms of Reference consistent with other Regional advisory committees

### **3. Background**

#### **The Agriculture and Agri-Food sector contributes \$2.7B to York Region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**

York Region is home to a vibrant agri-food industry with more than 700 farm-based businesses and 270 food and beverage manufacturers and distributors that contribute to the Region's economic vitality. The agri-food sector in York Region includes everything from farms to processors, food retailers and restaurants, and provides approximately 57,000 jobs and generates \$2.7 billion in GDP for York Region. Based on the 2016 Census of Agriculture, gross farm sales (a measure of farm business income) for primary food production in the Region, grew to approximately \$301 million.

#### **In 2017, Council approved the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy to guide long-term growth of the sector**

Supporting the farming community remains a priority for Council. In [October 2017](#), Council approved the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy (the Strategy) developed in collaboration with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) and local municipalities. The Strategy sets direction for long-term growth of the agriculture and agri-food sector and guides development of policy and program initiatives.

The Strategy articulates a comprehensive set of objectives defined within five strategic goal areas and 45 action items to be implemented over five years. The five strategic goals are to:

1. Strengthen communication and collaboration with York Region, local municipalities and the agri-food sector
2. Support the agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development
3. Support increased capacity for value added agri-food processing and support services
4. Leverage location within GTA and proximity to customers through direct farm marketing and meet demand for local food production
5. Provide support for business retention and expansion of primary agricultural production within York Region

Progress on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy initiatives is reported to Council as part of the annual update.

## **The Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee provides advice on the protection and promotion of agriculture and farming in the Region**

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee is a volunteer advisory committee that was created by Regional Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. The Advisory Committee has been involved in activities to promote and protect agriculture and local food in York Region. The group is similar to agricultural advisory committees in the Regions of Halton, Peel and Durham.

York Region Planning and Economic Development staff provide administrative and procedural support to the Advisory Committee and work collaboratively to implement the Strategy action plan.

## **The Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee is governed by a Terms of Reference that must be reviewed every four years and approved by Council**

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee's Terms of Reference determine its composition and operational guidelines. The group is required to meet quarterly, at a minimum, and individuals, interest groups or organizations may be invited to appear at any meeting as a delegation, or to submit/present information that will assist the Advisory Committee in fulfilling its mandate. Additional meetings may be called by the Chair. Meetings are typically held at the Regional Administrative Centre.

The original Terms of Reference were drafted in 2001 and last updated in 2015. The Terms of Reference for all Regional advisory committees are reviewed at the beginning of each new term of Council.

In December 2018, Council appointed the following Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee council representatives:

- Councillor Avia Eek on behalf of Mayor Pellegrini, King Township
- Councillor Hugo Kroon on behalf of Mayor Lovatt, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

## **4. Analysis**

The analysis below addresses the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy update and Terms of Reference review separately.

### **STRATEGY UPDATE**

#### **Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy implementation is on track**

The Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy identified 45 action items for implementation over five years (2018-2022) to support and grow the agriculture and agri-food sector.

In 2018, York Region staff worked closely with local municipal partners, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee, and agri-food stakeholders to evaluate the action items and develop a workplan to execute the Strategy.

As of December 2018, 31 of the 45 action items (68 per cent) were either initiated or planned. These include showcasing agricultural innovators/champions in the Region, launching a local food awareness campaign, supporting Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance on a project basis, facilitating relationships between producers, processors and retailers. A summarized list of action items grouped by status (initiated, planned, new and completed) is outlined in Attachment 2.

### **Four of five short-term action items were completed since adoption of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy**

In 2018, the following short term action items were completed:

- Hiring of Agriculture and Agri-Business Specialist in Economic Strategy dedicated to supporting the agriculture and agri-food sector in the Region
- Development of a strategic communications plan to strengthen collaboration and communication with local municipalities and the agri-food sector
- Participation in consultation and review of Greater Golden Horseshoe's Agricultural System policies (led by Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs)
- Development of the annual York Farm Fresh Guide Maps (2018) to raise awareness of locally produced agricultural products

### **Significant outreach occurred in 2018 with over 300 agri-food stakeholders to raise awareness of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy**

A key focus for 2018 was to engage with agri-food stakeholders to build partnerships and leverage resources to execute the Strategy. Staff hosted and/or attended over twenty five agri-food related events or meetings engaging over 300 stakeholders to raise awareness of the Strategy. The organizations engaged include the York Federation of Agriculture, York Region Food Network, York Farm Fresh Association, York Beef Producers, the Holland Marsh Growers' Association, and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance among others.

### **The Region established funding partnerships to deliver projects that align with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy**

York Region staff collaborated with two community partners, York Farm Fresh and Holland Marsh Growers Association to establish funding partnerships for 2018-2019 to deliver projects that support the Strategy.

- **Local Food Promotion:** York Farm Fresh connects York Region communities to locally grown products at farms and farmers markets. The Region funded York Farm Fresh as a service delivery agent for projects that directly align with the Strategy. Deliverables include raising awareness of locally produced agricultural products and the development of the local Farm Fresh Guide Map for 2019.
- **Economic Impact Study for the Holland Marsh:** The Holland Marsh is one of the two specialty crop areas within the Province. More than half of the Holland Marsh is located within York Region; a significant driver for local economy. The Region provided funding to the Holland Marsh Growers Association, leveraging provincial Rural Economic Development funding for an economic impact study of the Holland Marsh. Other project partners include King Township and Simcoe County. The study will be completed by December 2019.

### **Four agri-food education and awareness workshops were held in 2018**

In 2018, York Region staff delivered four agri-food education and awareness workshops and networking events in collaboration with internal departments and industry stakeholders. Event details include:

- Succession planning and tax management workshops for local farm businesses on January 18, 2018 and April 5, 2018. The workshops were attended by more than 50 farm businesses and provided options for protecting and transitioning family and farm assets, and provided tax management strategies. This was delivered in collaboration with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee.
- Business Waste Reduction Forum on September 28, 2018. The forum was attended by 55 agri-food businesses including food and beverage processors, retailers/grocery stores and food service providers. The forum provided an opportunity to educate and inspire local businesses to implement practical waste reduction solutions to reduce costs and achieve bottom line benefits. Ninety-six percent of the participants indicated that the event either exceeded or met their expectations.
- Asset Mapping Workshop in Newmarket on October 12, 2018. The workshop was attended by ten Regional/municipal staff from Ontario communities, and provided a practical guide to using ConnectON – an agricultural and food asset mapping database. The workshop was delivered by Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance.

### **The Advisory Committee members provided input on the Proposed Provincial Agricultural System Mapping Assessment**

The Region is currently conducting a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) to update the Regional Official Plan. As part of this process, agricultural lands are being reviewed and the Province has identified additional lands as potential Prime Agriculture.

The Agricultural and Agri-Food Advisory Committee has been engaged in the review of the proposed Provincial Agricultural Mapping System. A report on the review is anticipated for the June Committee of the Whole cycle.

## **2019 Agriculture and Agri-Food initiatives will focus on stakeholder communication, continued collaboration and capacity building**

In 2019, the Region, its local municipalities and Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee will continue to prioritize and deliver the action items as part of agriculture and agri-food initiatives.

2019 deliverables include:

- Continued collaboration with agri-food stakeholders on education and outreach activities to build capacity for the agri-food industry in York Region.
  - The Region supported an agri-food sustainability conference hosted by Provision Coalition on “Using the Power of Data for Making Food Sustainably” held on February 26-27, 2019 in the City of Vaughan. This event provided learning and networking opportunities for local agri-food businesses. Staff engaged with over 140 participants from the agri-food value chain, bringing awareness of agriculture and agri-food initiatives in York Region.
  - Staff hosted a two-day workshop on March 25, 2019 and April 1, 2019 – Growing Your Farm Profits – in partnership with Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) and the Township of King. The workshop, attended by 16 farm businesses was designed to help farmers develop and reach improved business goals and raise awareness of funding incentives from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership.
- Implementing the strategic communications plan to strengthen communication with stakeholders and raise the profile for the agriculture and agri-food sector across the Region. The plan includes:
  - A series of presentations to promote the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy initiatives to local municipal Councils, internal staff, and agri-food stakeholders. This provides an opportunity for staff to connect with stakeholders to leverage ongoing agriculture and agri-food resources and coordinate initiatives.
    - Staff delivered presentations to local Council in King Township and Georgina on April 15, 2019 and April 17, 2019 respectively.
    - Staff participated in the Earth Week Fair at the Region and hosted a lunch and learn to promote local food on April 26, 2019.
  - Launch of a local food awareness campaign in collaboration with York Farm Fresh in Q4 of 2019.

- Collaboration with York University Community Innovation Hub (YSpace) on a pilot in the Fall of 2019 to design components of a Food Accelerator Program. The program will assist food start-up companies (consumer packaged goods) in bringing their business access to markets and scaling up. The program will focus on four streams including product packaging, pricing, operational logistics, and sales strategies.

## **Staff continue to work with the Advisory Committee to deliver action items in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy**

Staff will continue to work with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee to evaluate and develop a work plan to deliver the remaining actions prioritized as medium to long term in the Strategy. These include development and implementation of an Agricultural Community Investment Plan, and an Agriculture and Agri-Food Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) study.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW**

### **The Terms of Reference for the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee has been updated**

Region staff initiated a review of the 2015 Terms of Reference with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee in August, 2018. Changes to the Terms of Reference were necessary to:

- Reflect the connection of the role of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy
- Make the Terms of Reference consistent with other advisory committees at the Region

### **The proposed Terms of Reference aligns closely with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy**

The majority of revisions in the proposed Terms of Reference have been made to align with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy. In addition, several operational changes have been made to make the Terms of Reference consistent with other Regional Advisory Committees (e.g., Planning Advisory Committee). The proposed Terms of Reference include three (3) strategic and five (5) operational revisions as outlined below:

Strategic revisions include:

- Adding agri-food presence to the group to balance representation from producers, input suppliers, food processing, distribution, food retailers and food service. This inclusion will make the Advisory Committee representative of the agri-food sector in the Region and reflect the intent of the Strategy.

- The Mandate section has been updated to include the purpose and reflect the connection to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy. The Goals section has been eliminated to make the Terms of Reference consistent with the Region’s other Advisory Committees.
- The name of the group and wording throughout the Terms of Reference has been revised to reflect and align with the Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy, as there is no mention of the Strategy in the current Terms of Reference. The name “Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee” will reflect the connection of the role of the group with the Strategy and other advisory committees.

Operational revisions include:

- Non-named members (from agricultural and agri-food groups) will remain eligible for re-appointment up to a maximum of two (2) terms, with a need to re-apply for consideration after each municipal election.
- Adding a public call for membership advertised through print and electronic media. Applications will be directed to the Office of the Regional Clerk, for consideration by Regional Council.
- Adding support from the Regional Clerk’s Office to coordinate and support Committee meetings.
- Increasing the number of meetings to six per year, with additional meetings that may be held at the request of the Chair.
- If membership is comprised of an even number, then quorum is one-half of the membership.

Consultation on the proposed Terms of Reference (Attachment 1) has occurred with the Regional Council representatives appointed by Council and a separate meeting was held with previous Liaison Group members to review the proposed changes.

### **Upon approval of the proposed Terms of Reference, the process for selecting Advisory Committee members will be initiated by staff**

Upon approval of the proposed Terms of Reference, staff will work with the Council representatives appointed to the Advisory Committee and the Regional Clerk’s office to recruit membership. Citizens and nominated representatives of organizations from agricultural and agri-food groups will be invited to apply. A public call for membership will be advertised through print and electronic media, including posting on York.ca. In addition, staff will reach out to past members and industry associations to spread the word for recruitment. A matrix with criteria will be established to evaluate the applicants. Qualified applicants will be interviewed by a panel of Regional Staff and a list of potential candidates will be recommended for council approval.



## **Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy is supported by approved Regional plans**

The goals and objectives of the Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy are supported and integrated within the following Regional Council approved plans:

- **Vision 2051:** Includes “A Resilient Natural Environment and Agricultural System” goal area where the agricultural areas are thriving and provide healthy food and resources to a growing population.
- **York Region Official Plan – 2010:** Chapter 6 is dedicated to Agricultural and Rural Areas which form an important part of the fabric of York Region, supporting a vibrant agricultural community.
- **2019 to 2022 Strategic Plan:** The strategic priority areas focus on “Building sustainable communities and protecting the environment with a resilient natural environment and agricultural system” and “Increasing economic prosperity by fostering an environment that attracts business, grows employment opportunities and attracts people”.
- **SM4RT Living Plan:** Food Waste Reduction Strategy and the Good Food Program, promote buying local farm fresh food to help residents gain a better connection and appreciation for their food while reducing food waste.

## **5. Financial**

The Strategy identified a number of strategic objectives and actions for consideration as part of implementation. Some of these are no cost or low cost, or are already pursued by the Region, while others have potential resource and budget implications. Funds for 2019 Agriculture and Agri-Food implementation activities are included in the approved budget.

## **6. Local Impact**

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy supports and complements the goals and interests of the Region’s local municipal partners. Staff from local municipalities participated in the development and review of the Strategy and will continue to attend Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee meetings. Regional staff partner with local municipalities to deliver programs and execute the Strategy. The Strategy is shared with local municipalities to be leveraged as they develop their respective agriculture and agri-food plans and initiatives.

## **7. Conclusion**

Through implementation of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy, York Region continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Implementation of the Strategy is on track with significant stakeholder outreach and engagement in 2018. A key focus for 2018 was to engage with agri-food stakeholders to build partnerships and leverage resources to execute the Strategy. In 2019, the Region, its local municipalities and Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group will continue to prioritize and deliver action items from the Strategy.

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee plays a key role in providing advice on agriculture, agri-food and rural matters in York Region. The proposed Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee Terms of Reference align the focus of the group with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy and make it consistent with other Regional committees. The progress on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy initiatives and the work of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee will be reported as a part of the annual update to Council.

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For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director of Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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Attachments (2)  
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