



Staff Report

Administration – Communications

Report To: COW-Finance, Admin, Fire, Community Services
Meeting Date: November 6, 2023
Report Number: FAF.23.162
Title: Open Fields Follow Up Report
Prepared by: Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.23.162, entitled “Open Fields Follow Up Report” for information.

B. Overview

This report provides Council with an overview of the success of the “Open Fields” Farm Tour event that was hosted by the Town’s Communications and Economic Development Division on Saturday, September 30, 2023, a free event featuring six locations for visitors to attend.

C. Background

The Open Fields Farm Tour was created to strengthen the relationship between local growers and the public. The Town of The Blue Mountains’ agricultural industry has a strong history and continues to be a major economic driver in the community. The tour was designed to teach the public about modern farming practices through guided tours at five different locations for the public to visit, as well as Bay Growers Inc. offering tours for those who pre-registered.

The five participating farms included The Farmers Pantry, TK Ferri Orchards, Georgian Hills Vineyards, Silver Spring Farms and Kimber Valley Farms.

The participating farms highlighted different aspects of the Town’s agricultural industry providing participants with a fun and engaging opportunity to learn about life on the farm. Each farm location had different experiences, including educational tours, workshops, demonstrations, farmers markets and live entertainment.

D. Analysis

The inaugural event welcomed approximately 2,500 farm visits across the six locations throughout the day. At Silver Spring Farms, visitors were required to check in upon arrival and the results showed that 60% of visitors were from the Town of The Blue Mountains.

Feedback received from visitors has been very positive with many expressing that they enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to learn about the farms in their community that they were previously aware of but generally unfamiliar with.

The event also received positive feedback from the hosts, with multiple locations saying they would like to be part of the Open Fields farm tour in future years. While the tour was planned as an educational experience for visitors, sites with a retail component reported sales that were twice as high as a typical Saturday in September.

The event was funded as part of the Town's Economic Development Strategy and the Government of Ontario through a Rural Economic Development grant. The Town also partnered with Grey County for the event and received additional on-site support from The Blue Mountains Public Library.

Town staff would like to acknowledge the volunteers who assisted with the events and the host locations for making the event possible with their hospitality and welcoming the public onto their property.

During the event, multiple members of the public inquired with Town staff regarding Open Fields' status as an annual event. Additionally, potential host locations were suggested by visitors for future years.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

Open Fields highlighted sustainable farming in the community and the importance of agriculture in The Blue Mountains.

G. Financial Impacts

The 2023 Budget included \$7,500 to support an agricultural event as recommended by the Town's Economic Development Strategy. Additional funding was received through a successful Rural Economic Development grant application funded by the Province of Ontario.

Expenses for the farm tour are being finalized as invoices are pending from various vendors, but staff expect that the full cost of the event will come in on budget.

H. In Consultation With

Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator communications@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

N/A

Respectfully submitted,

Allan Gibbons
Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	FAF.23.162 Open Fields Follow Up Report.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Oct 18, 2023

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Tim Hendry - Oct 18, 2023 - 10:10 AM

Shawn Everitt - Oct 18, 2023 - 8:01 PM