



Staff Report

Administration – Communications

Report To: COW_Finance_Admin_Fire_Community_Services
Meeting Date: November 18, 2024
Report Number: FAF.24.130
Title: Open Fields 2024 Follow-up
Prepared by: Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.24.130, entitled “Open Fields 2024 Follow-up” for information.

B. Overview

This report provides Council with an overview of the 2024 “Open Fields Farm Tour” event that was hosted by the Town’s Communications and Economic Development division on Saturday, October 5, 2024.

C. Background

The Open Fields Farm Tour was developed in consultation with the Town’s Agricultural Advisory Committee as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between local growers and the public. The tour was designed to teach the public about modern farming practices and the farm to table value chain through guided tours at five different locations.

The 2024 Open Fields event looked to build on the success of the first event, held in September of 2023. The five participating locations were Ardiel Acres, Blue Mountain Fruit Company, Dreamfield Holsteins, Kimber Valley Farms, and Spy Cider & Distillery.

The different locations highlighted various aspects of the Town’s agricultural industry and provided engaging and interactive opportunities to learn about farming in The Blue Mountains. Each site offered different experiences including tours, workshops, and entertainment.

D. Analysis

The Open Fields event hosted over 2,000 visitors across the five locations throughout the day, based on tracking estimates provided by staff. Based on visitor registration at Dreamfield Holsteins, over half of guests were from the Town of The Blue Mountains, and an additional 30% were from neighbouring municipalities.

Event feedback has been positive with attendees commenting how appreciative they were for the opportunity to learn about the agriculture community. The host locations also provided positive feedback and were incredibly gracious and welcoming to the hundreds of visitors that toured their properties. Town Staff would like to thank the host locations for their participation and dedicating a Saturday during the busy harvest season to be a part of the Open Fields event. It is a tremendous undertaking and the producers participation is due to their willingness to provide an educational opportunity for the public.

A video was captured of the day's events, available on the Town's website:
<https://www.thebluemountains.ca/media/12559>

The event was funded as part of the Town's Economic Development Strategy and by the Government of Ontario through the Rural Economic Development Grant. The Town partnered with Grey County and Grey Highlands for the event through promotion, consultation, and additional in-kind support. The Blue Mountains Public Library was a valued partner and provided on-site experiences at multiple locations during Open Fields and assistance through the planning process.

Town Staff acknowledge the volunteers who assisted with the event at the various locations, and once again the host locations for making the event possible with their hospitality.

Open Fields 2024 has been considered a success and preliminary planning has begun for the 2025 edition.

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 promoted the importance of agriculture in The Blue Mountains and various sites highlighted sustainable farming practices.

G. Financial Impacts

The 2024 Town Budget included \$10,000 to support the Open Fields event as recommended by the Town's Economic Development Strategy. Additional funding totaling \$14,750 was provided by the Rural Economic Development Grant from the Province of Ontario.

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

Execution of the Open Fields event, including set-up, day of activities, and event clean-up are estimated to have taken 90 staff hours. An additional 70 staff hours were spent in planning, applying for grants, working with vendors, and securing host locations.

H. In Consultation With

Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications & 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 Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications & Economic Development communications@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. There are no attachments.

Respectfully submitted,

Allan Gibbons,
Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

Tim Hendry
Manager of Communications & Economic Development

Shawn Everitt
Chief Administrative Officer

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	FAF.24.130 Open Fields 2024 Follow-up.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Oct 29, 2024

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

Tim Hendry - Oct 28, 2024 - 3:55 PM

Shawn Everitt - Oct 29, 2024 - 8:01 AM