

Lanark County has room to grow – in agriculture and business

Lanark County councillors heard good news on the agriculture and business retention fronts at the economic development committee of the whole meeting held Oct. 23.

Steve Duff, Chief Economist for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), was on hand with a presentation on food, agriculture, and economic opportunities in Lanark County. He outlined how the local food system fits into the broader system, including the global trade environment, highlighting the importance of local food and the system's economic value for consumers and producers.

"We import a lot of things that we can produce here," Mr. Duff said. "Lanark produces more specific primary agricultural production than its permanent year-round population can consume; we sell products across Ontario. In 2017, OMAFRA estimated Lanark farms produced more than \$50 million in farm cash receipts." This, he said, would translate into roughly \$153 million in direct gross domestic product. "The agri-food sector is a much larger presence in Lanark than most other parts of province. This is a strength to build on."

Mr. Duff noted Lanark County's farmland characteristics mean large-scale farming is not the norm. "Twenty-seven per cent of Lanark County farmers work full-time on the farm compared to the provincial average of 49 per cent. Proportionally there are more beef and small livestock farms." He noted the county has among the cheapest land and rent in Ontario, and the closest proximity to the City of Ottawa.

The permanent year-round population of Lanark County is seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for sector. "The aging population means less food consumption overall, but higher age and incomes can mean more demand for fresh food," Mr. Duff said.

Mr. Duff outlined opportunities in Lanark related to local food demand versus production. "In much of eastern Ontario, agriculture and agri-food can be a considerable economic opportunity. It takes time and work," he said. "There is lots of opportunity and jobs in agriculture, but it is hard to convince people of that."

Warden Richard Kidd (Beckwith Reeve) highlighted the fact there is room to grow. "Lanark County can be an incubator for young farmers."

Councillors also received a presentation from Valley Heartland Community Futures Development Corporation's Tina Stevens, general manager, and Amber Colville, program development, on the wrap-up of the business retention and expansion (BR+E) project.

The project was a partnership between the county and Valley Heartland and aimed to support and strengthen local business across the county. Through the project, volunteers and business

communities came together to help Lanark County and local municipalities better understand business needs and priorities.

Valley Heartland's economic development strategic plan originally had 16 action items. Nine are addressed or ongoing. Ms. Stevens presented highlights from the BR+E project and noted the remaining seven actions are captured in the BR+E action plan.

The seven actions include creating a regional service providers alliance to foster collaboration and coordinate activities; developing a standalone, centralized website for county economic and business development; creating a catalyst loan fund to support economic diversification and to develop new sources of income and market; reducing business barriers through coordination with municipalities, providing information sessions and connecting businesses with planning staff; organizing stakeholder workshops for municipalities and business support partners; organizing a labour market information committee to focus on high-level workforce development issues; and organizing consistent workforce development roundtables.

Warden Kidd thanked Ms. Stevens and Ms. Colville for their presentation and the actions they outlined. "These are all things that we can see or do and there are going to be results. We appreciate what you are doing for economic development in Lanark County."

More detail on the presentations can be found at <https://lanarkcounty.civicweb.net/document/99165>.

– 30 –

For more information, contact:

Leslie Drynan

Clerk/Deputy CAO

Lanark County

1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1502