



Eastern Ontario Agri-Food Network

Marketing Plan

Corporate Background

The Eastern Ontario Agri-Food Network (EOAN or the Network) was established in 2010 as a not-for-profit membership association. Its mandate is to coordinate the economic and social development of the local food sector in Eastern Ontario and foster dialogue and collaboration between farmers, agri-food businesses, municipalities, and community partners. The EOAN conducts its operations and public communications on both English and French.

The catchment area (the region) of the EOAN is the United Counties of Prescott-Russell (PR), the United Counties of Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry (SDG), the City of Cornwall (Cornwall), and the Ontario portion of the Mohawk Territory of Akwesasne (Akwesasne). The further area of interest is the south-eastern portion of Ottawa-Carleton and the Outaouais Valley in Quebec where enterprises and agencies in the EOAN's catchment area have business relationships, dependencies, farmers markets, and consumers.

Mission, Vision, Role

The mission of the EOAN is to "Enable economic prosperity and community wellbeing throughout the local agri-food value chains across the region of PR, SDG, Cornwall, and Akwesasne."

The vision: "The region of PR, SDG, Cornwall, and Akwesasne will earn a broadly recognized local food brand and reputation that will deliver prosperity from field to fork, make the local agri-food sector a prime choice for residents and visitors, and make the region a great place to live and visit."

The role of the EOAFN is to enhance the local food value chain specifically and the agri-food sector generally in Eastern Ontario and fostering collaboration between its members and partners through:

- a unified public voice for the local food farms, enterprises and stakeholders,
- collective intervention in public policy, investments, and regulations,
- support, training, and capacity building among food enterprises along the value-chain,
- marketing and promotion of local agri-food options to local residents and visitors, and
- connections and collaborations among agri-food enterprises, stakeholders, and community organizations.

For the sake of the EOAN mission, local food is defined as the value chain from field to fork where the production, processing, marketing and consumption of food is largely within its catchment area, plus multiple agri-tourism opportunities to market local food products directly to distant consumers either in their own region or when they visit the Network's region.

Local Food Market Opportunity

Local food has moved beyond the latest food fad and is heavily ingrained in Ontario's food culture. On March 18, 2019, the [government of Ontario announced](#) several steps to support the Local Food Act of 2013, including a local food hub and maps that connects local food businesses to potential new markets and offering how-to webinars for agri-businesses wanting to become a local food vendor.

The [Association of Municipalities of Ontario](#) published a comprehensive guide to best practices in developing the local food sector. Local food industry challenges include outdated planning policies and zoning by-laws, high cost of labour, lack of processing facilities, potential higher cost of local food, and lack of awareness among consumers. Municipalities also face their own challenges, such as aligning policies

with federal and provincial laws, coordinating programs across various departments and accessing funding for local food initiatives.

More recently in 2019, the FAAC ([Food and Agriculture Advisory Council of SDG, Cornwall, and Akwesasne](#)) published findings and recommendations for the agri-food sector after completing an in-depth consultation of the region. Many of these recommendations have informed the EOAN's future plan for the region.

The [Eastern Ontario Local Food Conference of 2019](#) took place in Cornwall and underlined the growing demand for local food among consumers, retailers, and distributors. Among the presenters, we heard from Chartwells: "Thinking Ahead Giving Back, specifically sustainability programming. Chartwells is currently developing programs such as the *Buy Local* sourcing platform to support Chartwells and the Compass Group's sustainability strategy." We also have been informed that Sobeys "is sourcing, supporting and nurturing local growers and producers across Ontario and has "boots on the ground" looking to strengthen existing and establish new relationships and build partnerships in the company's strategy of *Winning in Local*.

Mainstream media is reporting that the current COVID-19 crisis is impacting food processing concentration such as outbreaks that close down meat packers, and long distance transportation such as supply chain interruptions across borders. Therefore, [the consumer demand for local and organic food is surging](#) as a diversified, resilient, and tasty alternative to the mainstream food supply system. Furthermore, the Ontario government is investing to help local food producers and [farmers markets increase supply](#), increase food literacy, and reach more people.

The EOAN's Target Markets

While being inclusive of all food enterprises and the needs of the broad agri-food sector, the EOAN's focus includes the local food value chains, small farms in direct marketing, food artisans, and independent food enterprises that focus on local food production, processing, and consumption.

The EOAN has a triple layer of target customers and beneficiaries:

1. The EOAN's direct customers are the businesses and organizations in the catchment area that directly pay for, become members of, and participate in the EOAN.

This category includes:	The EOAN will deliver these values and impacts:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small farms selling their product and brand directly to local and distant consumers.• Small food and beverage businesses (artisans, processors, handlers, retailers, restaurants) that cater specifically to the local food scene and sell their local food product or brand to local and distant consumers.	The EOAN will positively impact their revenues, deliver or facilitate access to new markets and more customers, improve their skills and capacity, make their life easier, collectively promote their goods and services, attract local and distant customers to their location and brand, and connect them with suppliers and business partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Municipalities that partner with the EOAN to deliver their mandate of economic and social development specifically in the small scale agri-food sector, invest in developing local food value chains, enable institutional purchasing programs, and implement a post-	The EOAN is an extension of the economic and social development mandate of local municipalities by enabling the vitality of the local food scene, building the brand and reputation of the region, creating farms, small businesses and jobs, increasing the revenues of

COVID economic revitalization program with a focus on food and small business.	local food enterprises, retaining and attracting residents, and connecting regional institutions with local food sources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs, agencies, associations that partner with the EOAN to connect and collaborate with the local food community to deliver their mandate of economic development, social development, workforce development, sector development, food literacy and food security in the region. 	The EOAN will enable connections and collaborations in the agri-food sector by bridging the silos (counties, commodities, farmers, processors), facilitate discussion and problem solving forums, provide a collective voice, engage in collective policy and regulatory developments, and facilitate cross-sector projects.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses and sponsors in general who support the EOAN's objectives and pay the EOAN for access to the local agri-food sector. 	The EOAN will provide visibility and advertising opportunities to larger businesses and entities so that they may promote their brand, products, and services to the local food community.

2. The indirect customers of the EOAN are the customers of our customers (mostly the farms and food enterprises).

On behalf of its members in the local food community, the EOAN deploys communications tools, events, education, collaborative projects, and promotional tools to collectively connect its members to their customers in the target market regions, to help sell products to their target customers, and to bring their target customers into the region and to our members' place of business.

This category includes:	The EOAN will deliver these values and impacts:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local consumers in the region who could easily and repeatedly visit the local farmers, local food enterprises, and the farmers markets to purchase local products, and thus ensure that a larger proportion of food spending is retained locally. 	<p>A visual survey of local grocery stores shows that a very large proportion of food items arrive from outside our region, including poultry from Québec, beef from western Canada, fresh fruits and vegetables from the USA even with regional products are available in season, and processed foods and ingredients from around the world.</p> <p>A dollar spent on an imported product only leaves the retail margin (about 25%) in the local economy. A dollar spent on a local product leaves almost 100% in the local economy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distant Canadian consumers who could be directed to online or retail channels to purchase the products of our members, thus providing export revenues for the region. 	Given the location in Eastern Ontario, the local food enterprises can target and supply consumers in both Ontario and Quebec. The Montreal urban region is just next door, represents an enormous consumer market, can be enticed to visit, and has an ingrained culture

	that appreciates local flavours and artisanal food ("les saveurs du terroir").
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distant Canadian and international travelers coming to the region in order to participate in tours and events, visit the food enterprises, buy food to take home, spend money for meals and accommodations, and frequent other tourism venues and cultural events. 	Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto are major destinations for Canadian and foreign tourists. They travel the 401 and 417 highways between those three points. The eastern Ontario food region is right in their travel path. In partnership with the local tourism agencies, the EOAN needs to entice these travellers to get off the highway and enjoy our food enterprises, accommodations, festivals, local flavours, and restaurants.

3. The general beneficiary of the efforts of the EOAN is the general public in PR, SDG, Cornwall and Akwesasne. They develop their sense of pride, local identity, and quality of life thanks to a discernible, memorable, and broadly recognized local food brand, an active local food scene, a prosperous local food economy, strong personal food literacy, access to sufficient nutritious food, and a personal relationship with their farmer and food artisan.

Business Objectives and Outcomes

Despite its longevity, its strong governance, and the ongoing interest among local food enterprises, the EOAN has a limited to moderate impact on the local food economy due to several factors, primarily a small budget and a pattern of PR-centric activities and membership due to a history of sole funding from PR. Then the COVID pandemic of 2020 put a halt to the EOAN traditional set on in-person activities: training, social events, networking, farm tours, food festivals.

The primary goal of this plan is to re-launch the EOAN enable the EOAN to reach its full potential and drive a significant growth in the local food economy along with prosperity and wellbeing in the Network's catchment area.

The EOAN has the following annual business objectives for 2021 through 2023:

- Develop, implement, and grow a new recognizable brand for the local food of the region that will attract local consumers, institutional buyers, distant consumers, and Canadian and foreign tourists to our region's farms and food & beverage enterprises..
- For the first time, participate in consumer and tourism trade shows in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto to create awareness of the eastern Ontario food brand and attract agri-tourists to the region's farms and enterprises (Ottawa Valley Farm Show, Royal Winter Fair)
- Make local food, small business, and agri-tourism central elements of the post-COVID economic revitalization in the region.
- Grow its core annual funding from \$40,000 currently received from the PR to \$150,000 thus including Cornwall, SDG, members, sponsors and stakeholders.
- Grow its registered membership from 100 currently to 200 by the end of 2021, and 250 by the end of 2022, by delivering value and impact to its members.
- Implement an effective online membership management platform to improve internal operations and make member relations more efficient.
- Add at least two new farmers markets in the region in the summer of 2021 and 2022 that were not already present in 2020.
- Deliver six relevant training events for food enterprises in the region in 2021 and again in 2022, whereas there were none in 2020.

- Deliver two agri-art farm tours each year, whereas there were none in 2019 and 2020.
- Deliver three field-to-fork local food celebratory and promotional feasts or festivals annually, whereas there was one in 2019 and 2020 (the Eastern Ontario Garlic Festival).
- Add 50 more farms and food enterprises to the EOAN's marketing programs in 2021, and another 50 more in 2022.
- Invest in online, social media, and other advertising and promotions to attract local residents, consumers in Ottawa and Montreal, and visiting tourists to our region's brand and to our member's place of business.
- Facilitate periodic networking and collaboration meetings among stakeholders , under various pillars including public policy, local food business development, food literacy and food security, food operator capacity and workforce development. This is new to the EOAN and is inspired by prior activities of the FAAC.
- Work with tourism partners to make agri-tourism an important attraction for Canadian and foreign tourists travelling through the region.
- Conduct internal communications, member relations and communications, and public promotions in both English and French.
- Help grow the annual revenues of local food enterprises by 5% each year for the next 3 years, to be measured by satisfaction surveys of the members.
- Create 2.5 jobs in the EOAN delivering services to members, organizing promotional events and farm tours, conducting online advertising and communications, working with community stakeholders.

Pricing Strategy

For most of the last 10 years, the EOAN had membership fees that provided core funds for basic operations and some matching funds for grant applications. But a membership fee always forced a cash-strapped farm to weigh the pros and cons before spending the money, with many farms opting out after failing to see the personal impact.

In 2020, the Network opted for zero membership fees to remove any perceived barrier to membership but applied participation fees to training events, promotional activities, and farm tours. In 2020, the Network also started a three-year commitment of annual funding of \$40,000 from PR.

In 2021, the EOAN will implement a value-for-money revenue strategy to deliver benefits to all members:

1. Municipal annual core funding for basic operations and to provide matching funds for grants:
 - a. PR: \$40,000 already in place since 2020.
 - b. SDG: \$25,000 being proposed.
 - c. Cornwall: \$35,000 being proposed.
 - d. Akwesasne: for future consideration.
2. Farms, with or without on-farm processing: zero membership fee to encourage broad membership in 2020, progressing to \$50 in 2022 as the Network demonstrated value for money.
3. Farmers markets: zero membership fee since the vendors at markets are already members of the EOAN.
4. Non-farming food enterprises: \$250 annual membership fee.
5. Other stakeholders, NGOs, associations, agencies: \$250 annual membership fee.
6. Sponsors: \$2,000 membership fee for visibility and advertising benefits.
7. Consumers: \$25 when consumers go beyond purchasing local food and wish to support and develop their supply of local food.
8. Various admission fees for members to participate in festivals, feasts, farm tours, training events.

Communications and Promotion

The EOAN will implement these communications and promotional tools:

- The website to inform consumers and memberships, resources for members, linkages to service providers, visibility for sponsors.
- The online local food asset map that directs consumers to our members.
- Social media and other digital platforms, specifically Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google including free postings and paid advertising, to provide local food news, member profiles, events, invitations, and education.
- A regional food and beverage brand that relates to the geographic location, the innovative local flavours, and the bilingual nature of the region.
- Printed flyers, stickers, post cards for postal distribution, display at tourist kiosks, display at member locations, and inclusion in product packages.
- Signage on highways, county roads, airports, railway stations.

Competition

There is no competition or overlap with any other agency or association trying to collectively market and develop local food in the region.

The local food enterprises and farmers markets largely market their business on their own while some of them work with the EOAN. Several local businesses enjoy significant success with their own efforts, such as [Glengarry Fine Cheese](#) in Lancaster and [Beau's Brewing Company](#) in Vankleek Hill. But that success is not easy to replicate when food enterprises are left to their own resources.

Outside the region, the EOAN is competing with other regional organizations to deliver our local food and beverages into their catchment area and attract their residents to travel to our region for our unique food experience. Some distant examples include [Savour Ottawa](#), [Savour the County](#) in PEC, and [Local Montreal Food Tours](#).

However, some of those neighbouring food organizations can also be collaborators. For example, Savour Ottawa and Ottawa Tourism cannot get enough local food to feed a largely urban population. Therefore the EOAN is the closest regional partner to establish a win-win relationship.