

# **North Norfolk Area Business Leader Forum & Buy Local Discussion**

## **Final Report**

**February 2009**



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## **Background**

In September 2008, Neil Christoffersen, Reeve of the Rural Municipality of North Norfolk, approached Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) staff Bob Wheeler and Angela Pearen Burnside to hold an evening event with a keynote presentation by Ken Meter, with Crossroads Centre in Minneapolis, a leader in regional food economies. This evening event, held on October 22, was promoted as an opportunity for communities to discover and discuss the potential of buy local initiatives in their area. A second event was held in the Town of Carberry on November 20 and featuring presentations by the local Field to Farm Supper, Feast on Local Food Initiative and Harvest Moon Society. At these events, communities were encouraged to take the knowledge and enthusiasm gained back to their communities for discussion.

The communities in the RM of North Norfolk quickly set a meeting for their community to begin discussion regarding buy local initiatives. The meeting took place in the form of a Business Leaders' Forum with funding from Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives. Representatives from the Austin Chamber of Commerce approached community members in the North Norfolk area to attend the meeting held on February 2, 2009. The agenda for the forum, included brainstorming and discussion in areas of community assets and challenges and buy local initiatives. The evening concluded with discussion regarding action planning and determining responsibilities in moving these actions forward. The forum was attended by 13 members of the community – a list of whom may be found in Appendix A. The following report contains the results of discussion from the forum.

## **Process**

The Business Leaders' Forum was facilitated by MAFRI staff. Through facilitated discussion the forum participants were asked the following questions:

### **Area Assets and Challenges**

- *What activities and services, do or could make a positive difference in your community?*
- *What are the issues, concerns or challenges facing rural businesses today?*
- *What do you feel you contribute to make your community a better place? What contribution as a community leader would you like to make given the opportunity?*

### **Buy Local Initiatives**

- *What does the phrase “buy local” mean to you?*
- *What type of buy local initiatives would you like to see implemented in Austin and area?*
- *What are the challenges to creating a buy local initiative?*
- *Who should be responsible for taking the lead on a buy local initiative?*

The forum concluded with discussion regarding action plans to move the process forward. Participants began with action planning process through the use of an action planning sheet. The actions created by the participants can be found in Appendix B.

## Key Findings

- The strongest asset of the area is the people who live there. Described as “determined, friendly” and “amazing”, it is felt that the area has a magnetic appeal to attract people to reside there.
- Lack of competition and certain services are challenges faced by the area. There is also a lack of physical infrastructure to support business development.
- The residents of the area contribute a significant amount of time to their community through volunteer and promotional efforts. The residents are a variety of ages and occupations, from self-employed entrepreneurs, to service providers and retirees.
- The term “buy local” was defined in terms of influencing consumer purchasing choices and exploiting the benefits to the consumer, community and environment.
- Participants identified several buy local initiative ideas focusing on the creation of a farmers’ market, community promotion, consumer education and business development.
- The challenges of creating buy local initiatives can be addressed through communication and education.
- In order for the buy local initiatives to move forward in the area, an individual or group with a vested interest in the outcome must take a leadership role.

What do you feel you contribute to make your community a better place?

...always talking community with people to work and play together with  
harmonious balance with young and old.

~ forum participant

## **Results of Discussion**

### Area Assets and Challenges

#### *Assets*

##### People

Participants noted that there is a strong sense of community in the area and that residents are determined to maintain the vibrancy of their communities. Words such as “amazing” and “friendly” were used to describe area residents. One participant noted that the area holds a “magnetic appeal” which draws people to live in the area and encourages people to return to raise their families or retire. It was also stated that an area asset is youth living in the area.

##### Infrastructure

The following were listed as infrastructure assets in the area:

- Manitoba Agricultural Museum – tourism benefits
- Location – along Trans Canada Highway and Provincial Highways
- Recreation Facilities – new golf courses starting
- Personal Care Home in MacGregor
- Two campgrounds
- Active volunteer fire department
- Grocery stores
- Restaurants
- Schools
- Churches
- Gas stations
- New community halls
- Library
- Healthy Community Committee

#### *Assets – Wish List*

- Hardware store (Austin)
- Farm supply store
- Automotive mechanic
- Day care (Austin)
- Fitness Centre
- Lounge
- Handi van service between Austin and MacGregor
- Accommodations
- Market Garden/Farmers’ Market
- Retaining seniors – seniors housing
- Entertainment services – movie night, dinner theatre

### *Issues/Concerns and Challenges*

The following are issues/concerns and challenges that were identified:

- Regulations – regarding farmers’ markets and others
- Encouraging development – it is difficult to attract developers to build on spec when quick return and volume can not be guaranteed
- Remaining competitive in a mobile society – need volume
- Financial support from consumers
- Need competition – lower overhead makes rural businesses able to provide competitive prices
- One financial institution – no competition
- Competent workforce
- Lack of entrepreneurs
- Vocational trades training in schools
- Challenge – to change consumer’s buying patterns
- Lack of retail space and extra space on “main street” to build new buildings, result may be creation of retail space away from “main street”
- Lack of office space

### *Participant Contributions*

Participants identified their contributions and these reflected three theme areas: business, people and promotion/community development.

#### Business Development

- Shop local
- Business experience
- Leadership
- Business Owner
- Provide a place to stay (accommodation)
- New and old farming concepts

#### People

- Community Volunteer (several responses)
- Giving of Time (several responses)
- Serve on local boards/committees
- Willingness to work at community events
- Organize community groups

#### Promotion/Community Development

- promote the community (several responses)
- desire to see “helping” people programs go
- always talking “community” with people
- promote local facilities
- help develop the area
- invest in the area

Participants were asked what they would contribute to the area if they had access to unlimited resources. The following are their responses:

- Find money to build a larger care home
- Create an eco-farming education program
- Invest into needed businesses – such as hardware store
- Build a technical school for trades such as: carpentry, metal work, auto body etc, start this education in elementary schools
- Build housing for seniors
- Develop more housing to rent to families
- Start a fitness centre

### Buy Local

Participant responses when asked to define “buy local” can be categorized into two areas: purchasing and benefits to the consumer, community and environment

#### Purchasing

- Buying in your community
- Spending money on everything – groceries, fuel, lumber, housewares, flowers
- Supporting recreation facilities
- Giving money to the little guy not the big one
- Think Manitoba first, then Canada, then North American when purchasing manufactured products
- Create an inventory of what we can buy and where
- Promote local services to consumers
- Sell locally produced items
- 100 mile diet
- Eating local foods

#### Benefits – Consumer, Community and Environment

- Attend community events
- Don't have to drive
- Environmental benefits – reduction in fuel costs
- Saves time and time is money

#### Other Comments

- buying local means supporting new ideas
- education is key
- want to see businesses succeed

The participants created a long list of initiatives that could be undertaken to encourage people to buy local and to attract people to visit their communities. Ideas of initiatives include:

- Create aggressive buy local tax initiatives in the area
- Create economic development peer groups
- Offer self-guided tour days
- Promote the town/area by adopting a theme reflective of the Agricultural Museum
- Transform Austin's main street into a street from yesteryear
- Advertising campaigns
- Promote a 100 mile diet
- Attract more specialized local processing and packaging plants – meats, grains, fruits and vegetables
- Entice value added production i.e. a pasta factory
- Undertake education activities on what it means to buy local and change the way people think about buying locally
- Teaching “buy local” in our schools
- Encourage a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) project
- Develop a group of growers to coordinate a market garden
- Establish a farmers' market in the community again (several responses)

The challenges of implementing buy local initiatives were identified as:

- The “buy in” from locals
- Need a hook to attract people to the community, hook could be theme
- Improve the perception of buying local
- Address competition concerns – local producers may impact business of retailers (fresh vegetables, baked goods)
- Health regulations
- Marketing – perhaps we could learn from Peak of the Market
- Time
- Lack of local resources – economic development officers
- Need a champion

The participants noted that a group with a vested interest in the outcome should be responsible for taking the lead. The people taking a leadership role need to have time available and the energy to take on this project.

## **Next Steps – Action Planning**

A long list of ideas of possible initiatives were identified. The first step is to prioritize the top 5 – 6 initiatives. It is usually better to focus on a few top priorities. The following questions must be considered in order to develop an Action Plan:

- What actions could be realistically carried out in the short term, with the resources available to you?
- What actions require planning to implement in the medium to long-term (one to three years) goals?
- What actions give the biggest bang for the buck?
- What actions complement or build on other projects in the community?
- How will these actions affect other groups/events/projects in the community?
- What actions could be delegated to other community groups?
- What actions build on the strengths or resources you have?

The final Action Plan will determine:

1. Priority Initiatives
2. Who or what organization will implement the actions
3. How the actions will be carried out
4. When it will be done (timeframe)
5. Resources required

## **Recommendations**

- ⇒ Complete action planning process.
- ⇒ Undertake research by visiting successful farmers' markets in similar sized communities; meet with market organizers by conference call after the visit.
- ⇒ Identify organizations that implement innovative marketing plans such as Peak of the Market and set up meetings with them

**Appendix A**  
**Participant List**

Chad Bodnarchuk, Austin

Neil and Cathy Christoffersen, Austin

Allan and Hilda Dyck

Keith Jaeger, Austin

Ron and Mary Kalberg, Bagot

Ken Klassen, Austin

Don and Bev Makinson, Austin

Doris Moore, MacGregor

Wayne Nichol, MacGregor

## Appendix B

### Action Planning Worksheet

Key Objective: Create a farmers' market in the area

Goal: To start and keep a successful year round farmers' market.

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Resources Required</b>
Advertise – highway #1, radio, internet, word of mouth		Make or buy signs, make up ads for radio and internet	Within the next month	Money, signs, people to volunteer
Call people who would like to be a part of this	Local gardeners and producers	Start calling and asking around, make list of people who might be interested	Right away	Time and money
Advertising	Committee	Radio coverage, collect fee from vendors for expenses	One per month	Facility for each season
Organize a committee, advertise, set up, location, maybe have entertainment	Volunteers from community, local talent	Advertise in paper, posters, set meetings	1 day per week – July-Oct	Time, volunteers
Identify and place, size of market		Process of selection	Soon	Need a committee
Identify time for market			TBA	OMG not another committee, YES, another committee
Promotion		Word of mouth, internet, mail outs	Starting now	People (mouths), computer
Start a group	Farmers' market committee	Check health regulations, find a location	Summer 2009	

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Resources Required</b>
Need committee	Vendors	Promote then call a meeting	Sooner than later	MAFRI and farmer participants
Promotion	Press agent	Media – any means possible	Once your plan is in place	Funding for promotions, pie social or membership fee
Form key group of producers	Someone in the business	Word of mouth	ASAP	Time
Establish a spot to have it	Group			
Set out marketing strategies	Group			
Supply local produce to area in an organization of local growers	Local grower group	Advertising, word of mouth, media	Soon as possible	Business planners (experts), financial planners, labour avenues
Local promotion – advertising	Economic development committee	Bill board, news print	June	Cost of analysis of buying “outside”, benefits of eating local foods, pictures of local producers “story”
Creating Vendors	Economic development committee	Using created ads, “lighting the fire within”, supporting vendors, ideas etc	Feb-May	List of cottage businesses, list of regulations
Create a group	Producer	Word of mouth		Time/money, location

**Other Comments:**

- have market within sight of highway junction, at tourist booth
- resource people to help, get volunteers, avoid alienating your local businesses i.e. prepare the way, seek location, participants
- concerns of local grocer’s
- manpower for market, overall manager or administrator

Key Initiative – Education

Goal – Get people to shop local, improve local business to where people will travel to Austin to shop.

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Resources Required</b>
Teach local people first to buy in Austin	Consumers, producers	Education, advertising, public meetings	Now	Time, money
Promote Austin for tourism (museum), tourists buy here	Tourists	Promotion	For summer	
Promote the things we already have, restaurants, gas, museum	Business owners			