

INSPIRING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Inspiring Rural Communities is a collection of stories from rural Ontario communities. It is inspired by people who see economic potential in their home towns and are eager to share their experiences.

FARMERS' MARKETS ARE GROWING IN ONTARIO

Come for the freshness ... stay for the fun! That's the idea behind farmers' markets in Ontario. Thanks to a new rural partnership and help from the Ontario government, there are now more opportunities to shop for farm fresh foods while getting to know the farm family responsible.

"Lots of consumers recognize the value of a farmers' market. They know it's good. They also recognize that it adds to their community," says Bob Chorney, Executive Director of Farmers' Markets Ontario, a non-profit association for farmers' markets. Chorney knows that for many small communities, "market day is the busiest business day of the week. The farmers' market draws customers and the community comes alive."

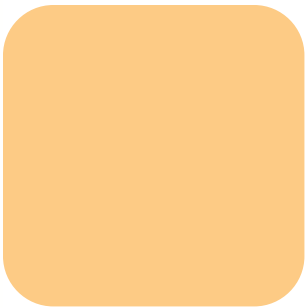
With a basket full of new ideas and lots of enthusiasm, Farmers' Markets Ontario approached the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association to launch a new rural partnership aimed at enhancing farm fresh sales.

Their new Project TEAM initiative stands for:

- o Train leaders, managers and vendors in best practices;
- o Expand the number of vendors, farmers' markets and level of sales;
- o Ally business, agriculture and community groups; and
- o Market or promote farmers' markets and farm vendors.

Thanks to the Project TEAM initiative, farmers' markets across Ontario revved up their promotion in 2007, the first year of the program. Signage was enhanced in all areas of the province including new signs on the 400 series highways so tourists and local travelers can easily find the markets. Hundreds of special events were staged at local farmers' markets and the results were felt in increased sales.

Under Project TEAM twenty new farmers' markets were established and 2,800 new seasonal jobs were created.



“When customers stop at a farmers’ market, roadside market or a pick-your-own operation, the farmer takes on added responsibility for ensuring food safety. Everything has to be right,” according to Cathy Bartolic of the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association. Under the “Team” initiative, food handling and food safety certification workshops were delivered and well received. Other educational resources were posted for both farmers and consumers at www.ontariofarmfresh.com.

The Ontario government helped get Project TEAM up and running with financial assistance through the Rural Economic Development Program. “We saw the potential of Project TEAM to forge an important partnership in rural Ontario. Through improved marketing of farm fresh food, we’re building an important bridge from the farm gate to the dinner plate,” says Leona Dombrowsky, Ontario’s Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Anyone who has taken the opportunity to shop at farmers’ markets or directly from a farm knows that no two markets are the same. They have their own personalities just like the people in their local communities. The partners in Project TEAM are working to enhance the marketing of farm fresh food through unique markets while ensuring standardized approaches to food safety and handling.

For more information about the Project TEAM initiative, contact Bob Chorney at fmo@farmersmarketsontario.com or Cathy Bartolic at cathy@ontariofarmfresh.com.

Please contact the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at 1 (888) 588-4111 or visit www.ontario.ca/rural if you would like more information about the Rural Economic Development Program.