
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group Update and Related Initiatives

FROM: Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group (PAAWG), the Peel Rural Water Quality Program (PRWQP), the Alternative Land Use Services Peel Pilot (ALUS Peel Pilot), Grown in Peel Local Food Guide and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA).

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2022, PAAWG:
 - Assisted in the development of the ALUS Peel Pilot Project and program guidelines; and
 - Launched the Grown in Peel Local Food Guide for the first time since 2019 which included a refreshed website with an interactive map of farm and farmers' market listings.
 - PAAWG approved PRWQP and ALUS Peel Pilot grants totaling \$124,418 which supported 17 on-farm stewardship projects. The funding contributions from the PRWQP also leveraged an additional \$192,566 from other funders to assist with the completion of the 17 projects.
 - In 2022, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Region of Peel, ALUS Canada, Credit Valley Conservation and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority was signed, launching the ALUS Peel Pilot which complements the existing PRWQP, increasing support for on-farm environmental stewardship projects at no additional cost to the Region.
 - The GHFFA and the Region of Peel continue to collaborate on agriculture and agri-food initiatives relevant to the Region.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Peel recognizes the contributions of the agricultural sector to the local economy, to environmental conservation and to the cultural heritage of the Region. In 1997, the Region established PAAWG to act as an advisory body to Regional Council and to build closer connections to the farming community. A 2020 study by the Greenbelt Foundation found that such advisory bodies play an important role helping to facilitate the exchange of information between municipalities and the agricultural sector and a better understanding of the issues facing farmers.

Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group Update and Related Initiatives

This report provides summaries of PAAWG's activities in 2022, the PRWQP, the ALUS Peel Pilot, which launched in March 2022, the Grown in Peel Local Food Guide and the GHFFA, which is supported with funding from the Peel Region and other partners.

2. Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group

PAAWG is appointed by Council to assist the Region in protecting agricultural lands and supporting the agricultural industry in Peel. PAAWG is comprised of 14 members which include the following:

- Regional Chair (ex-officio),
- Three members of Region Council,
- Two representatives of the Peel Federation of Agriculture,
- Two representatives of the Peel Soil and Crop Improvement Association,
- Two representatives from agricultural special interest groups,
- Three citizens-at-large, and
- One representative from the agricultural community.

PAAWG keeps the Region informed of issues and concerns of the agricultural community and provides the agricultural sector with an opportunity to learn about and provide input to regional initiatives. PAAWG played a major role in launching the ALUS Peel Pilot, provided input to the Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan Review and contributed to the Region's efforts to achieve its agricultural goals, objectives and policies.

a) 2022 Programs and Projects

i) Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan Review

PAAWG was provided with regular updates on the Peel 2051 Regional Official Plan Review. It received presentations and provided comments on final reporting to Regional Council for Council approval of the Regional Official Plan, and on Provincial modifications to the Prime Agricultural and Rural Area mapping in the Provincially approved Regional Official Plan.

ii) Peel Rural Water Quality Program

The Region, in partnership with Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), has implemented the PRWQP since 2004. The PRWQP provides technical and financial resources to farmers to encourage stewardship focused on protecting and enhancing water quality and the natural environment. PAAWG is the approval authority for grant applications submitted under the program.

In 2022, PAAWG approved approximately \$102,461 in PRWQP grants supporting the implementation of 17 voluntary farm stewardship projects. The grants leveraged an additional \$127,418 from project proponents and other funders (e.g., Provincial Species at Risk Stewardship Program, Conservation Authority restoration services, etc.) to help complete these projects. The projects included tree planting, cover crops, a nutrient management plan and strategy, natural area enhancement and creation, and livestock fencing from environmentally sensitive features. Appendix I provides more information about the program's accomplishments in 2022.

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iii) Grown in Peel

The Grown in Peel Local Food Guide has been published by the Region since 2006. It is a joint initiative with the Planning and Development Services Division and Peel's Healthy Eating Team within Peel's Health Services Department.

Grown in Peel is a local food marketing initiative to promote local agriculture, connect residents to the farmers who produce their food, and increase residents' access to safe, healthy, and affordable food in Peel. Grown in Peel displays information about participating farms and farmers' markets, lists the products sold at each farm and farmer's market, and provides information about healthy eating.

The Grown in Peel initiative was paused in March 2020 due to redeployments of staff for the COVID-19 response. The initiative was relaunched in May 2022 with a new, online format for the 2022 farm and farm market year.

iv) Other Topics

The following additional topics and projects in 2022 were reviewed by PAAWG for discussion and feedback:

- Launch of the Grown in Peel Local Food Guide initiative and online map
- Launch of the ALUS Peel Pilot and approval of first projects
- Region of Peel new Source Water Protection Incentive Program
- Region of Peel Significant Woodland and Invasive Species policies
- Region of Peel Capital Works Project Portal
- 2021 Agricultural Census profile for Peel Region
- Town of Caledon Resilient Caledon Climate Change Action Plan
- TRCA Natural Heritage and Water Resource Mapping Project
- Environmental Registry of Ontario postings:
 - a. Proposed regulatory changes for beneficial reuse of excess soil at pits
 - b. Bill 23 - *More Homes, Built Faster Act*
 - c. Proposed Amendments to the Greenbelt Plan and Greenbelt Area boundary regulation

b) 2023 PAAWG Work Plan

The following action items have been identified in the 2023 PAAWG work plan. Appendix II provides more detailed information about the work plan.

Policy Research, Development and Monitoring

- Where requested, provide input to the review of local municipal Official Plans, specifically on the Agricultural System and Natural Heritage System components.
- Review and provide comment on the release of proposed Provincial modifications to the Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan, specifically on the Agricultural System and Natural Heritage System components.

Policy and Program Implementation

- Review and provide advice on the delivery of the ALUS Peel Pilot (e.g., implementation guidelines, community engagement and communications).

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- Review and approve PRWQP and ALUS Peel Pilot applications and corresponding project funding.
- Provide input to the five-year review of the PRWQP Guidelines.
- Advise on the development of initiatives to support the Agricultural System in Peel including opportunities to develop an agricultural and agri-food strategy.
- Advise on the development of recommended Agricultural Impact Assessment Terms of Reference.

Regional Projects and Initiatives

- Support the Grown in Peel Local Food Guide.
- Participate in and comment on action items identified in the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan.
- Support the Peel Food Action Council and implementation of the Peel Food Charter.
- Review and comment on proposed Regional capital infrastructure development projects and initiatives.
- Review and comment on partner (e.g., Conservation Authority, local municipal, etc.) programs and projects impacting Peel's agricultural community.

Communication and Outreach

- Assist in developing Peel Region farm tours and other communication and outreach initiatives.

3. ALUS Peel Pilot

a) Background

ALUS Canada is a Canadian non-profit organization that works with farmers to restore natural habitat and provide erosion control and flood mitigation on marginal farmland by providing annual financial support to farmers through local, community-led programs.

ALUS Canada shares many of the goals and principles of the PRWQP. Like the PRWQP, ALUS focuses on supporting voluntary stewardship among farmers, with farmers playing a key role in designing and delivering the program at the community level.

In 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed, creating the first partnership of its kind in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, reflecting the Region's leadership in supporting the environmental stewardship work of farmers. In March 2022, the ALUS Peel Pilot was launched to Peel's agricultural community.

b) The ALUS Peel Pilot

Through the MOU, ALUS Canada has committed a minimum level of base funding of \$164,500 over the three years of the pilot. The funding provided by ALUS Canada will, at a minimum, cover the costs of annual payments to farmers for natural habitat restoration projects.

In 2022, 10 projects were approved by PAAWG for ALUS annual payment grants. The total value of ALUS annual payment grants allocated in 2022 (paid and expected payments) is \$21,957.

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PAAWG supports the ALUS Peel Pilot and will provide advice to staff on the implementation of the program as well as approve funding for project applications. Staff will report back on the outcomes of the ALUS Peel Pilot with recommendations on whether to extend the pilot beyond the initial three-year term.

4. Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance

The GHFFA was formed in 2012 as a partnership among the Regional Municipalities and Federations of Agriculture in the Golden Horseshoe and the single tier municipalities of Hamilton and Toronto. The GHFFA also includes representation from other stakeholders such as the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Greenbelt Foundation and colleges and universities with an interest in agriculture and food.

In 2020, the GHFFA developed a new Action Plan to guide the GHFFA over the next five years, from 2021 to 2026. The agri-food system in the Golden Horseshoe is facing new challenges with unprecedented levels of food insecurity, the urgency of climate change, labour issues and supply-chain disruptions adding to the existing pressures on the system. The new Action Plan has the following goals with priority actions attached to each:

- The GHFFA is recognized as the leading organization with expertise on food and farming issues and opportunities in the Golden Horseshoe Region of Ontario;
- Establish the Golden Horseshoe as Canada's leading innovative agriculture and agri-food cluster; and,
- Enable the agri-food cluster to support sustainability outcomes.

Each municipal partner has supported the GHFFA and the implementation of the Action Plan through in-kind staff time and a financial contribution of \$30,000 per year. The funding provided by the municipal partners assists in leveraging provincial and other funding to implement the Action Plan. Through this collaboration, the Region is able to cost-share and leverage resources on projects having greater impact to the Region and the regional agricultural system.

a) Accomplishments 2022

During 2022, the GHFFA undertook the following in support of the Action Plan:

- Completion of a Government relations strategy
- Scarborough FreshFood Market program
- ConnectON Agricultural System database updates including the development of an interactive dashboard
- Knowledge transfer of long-term care study results
- Position paper on urban agriculture
- Continued sharing of best practices in economic development and land use planning among staff members of the partner municipalities

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The PRWQP, with an annual base grant budget of \$75,000, provides direct grants to farmers undertaking approved environmental stewardship projects funded from CVC and TRCA Special Levy projects. The ALUS Peel Pilot does not result in additional costs to the Region or the Conservation Authorities.

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The Region has been supporting the GHFFA through its annual operating budget of \$30,000 since 2014. This funding was approved by Regional Council to continue for a period of five years from 2022 to 2026, the term of the GHFFA's new Action Plan, subject to annual Regional Council Budget approvals.

CONCLUSION

The Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance facilitate and enhance relationships between the Region and agricultural groups, other municipalities and stakeholders within Peel Region, across the Golden Horseshoe and with the Province. Both organizations make important contributions supporting farmers and the agricultural system in Peel Region. The ALUS Peel Pilot complements the existing Peel Rural Water Quality Program, providing incentives for farmers to increase their environmental stewardship activities. The Grown in Peel Local Food Guide continues to connect Peel residents to Peel's vibrant agricultural businesses promoting local food access opportunities.

APPENDICES

Appendix I - Peel Rural Water Quality Program and ALUS Peel-2022 Status Report

Appendix II - Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group 2023 Work Plan



Kealy Dedman, Commissioner of Public Works

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