

Local guide to farm gate sales in county an award-winner

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Hired as a youth intern last November, Trissia McAllister has been very busy working on Northumberland County's award-winning farm gate guide.

Mrs. McAllister, who lives just west of Castleton, picked up a role in the project which became part of the county's 2005 economic development strategy to build a competitive and diversified economy. She's been busy ever since, finding farms to include in the guide, helping with the design, layout and editing in preparation for inclusion in the county Web site.

In the county's 2005 strategy, agriculture was identified as a key priority. Funding from the Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation, the Rural Economic Development Program and the Food Action Committee gave the county enough money to complete the first two steps in creating a greater profile for Northumberland agriculture.

Trissia was hired on to assist in the completion of the farm gate guide and is currently working on a similar arts guide for the county planned for release in December.

The farm gate guide was the recipient of a first-place award in the 2007 Marketing Canada Awards at the Economic Developers Association of Canada conference in September.

Prior to joining the county, the public relations graduate of Humber College gained experience in her field with her own digital restoration and wide format printing business in St. Catharines. She and her new husband, Nathan, now reside on his family farm west of Castleton.

Trissia was at a council meeting in Brighton Oct. 9 relating the success of the farm gate guide and the county's plans to extend its agriculture initiatives.

The county's first step once the



PHOTO BY BOB OWEN

Youth Intern Trissia McAllister shows off the award-winning *Proudly Northumberland Farm Gate Guide* after her presentation to Brighton council Oct. 9.

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strategy was established was to develop a brand that was clear, credible and convincing, while connecting emotionally with the consumer. Work on the brand was completed in April 2007.

The youth intern explained the blue represents water, the green stands for growth, life, the environment. The seed icon introduces the agricultural component.

From there the county staff went to work on the *Proudly Northumberland Farm Gate Guide* which now boasts 65 local farms that retail everything from

fruit and vegetables to hay and fleece. Eight are in Cramahe Township.

If responses from the three Cramahe agriculture businesses contacted by this newspaper was any indication, the guide has been a roaring success.

Dairy farmer Bob McComb offers square bales, freezer beef and bagged grain in his guide listing. He's sure it's working. People are reading it.

He had a couple show up to buy some square bales. They simply followed the map - and made a purchase.

Peggy Howden at Old Barn Perennials on County Road 2 east of Colborne remarked that two ladies from Port Hope read about her business and came to take a look. She's given out 18 of the 20 copies of the guide she received. People seemed to really like it. She hopes the county updates it for next year.

The guide has been a real boon to Pieter's Appleyard on the outskirts of Colborne. Jess Madamba says it has been a good year and business is growing. He attributes much of the growth to the Internet, where the guide can

be accessed, and to the farm guide itself.

When unfamiliar customers show up for his 31 varieties of apples and his pears, he asks where they are from. He now has customers from Mississauga, Minden and Kingston. "The guide has had a tremendous impact," Mr. Madamba says.

Farm businesses listed in the guide post an official "This is a proudly Northumberland Farm" sign on their properties. People know when they show up at the gate, they have the right place.

The guide is more than a "shop local" booklet. It offers good reason to buy locally.

Less fossil fuel is used to get the produce to market, there's less packaging. It's fresher, and more nutritious. And every \$1 spent on farm goods brings \$2.27 to the community through spinoffs.

Local farmers' markets are also in the book with their days of operation, as well as a long list of local agriculturally related events in the county.

To avoid consumer frustration the guide's creators posted a chart showing when various fruits and vegetables are in season in Northumberland.

The guide includes some definitions to help consumers know what they are buying and make the right food decisions.

On the horizon is the creation of a new sticker to place on food grown or raised in Northumberland. County staff is working with local retail businesses that use Northumberland farm produce to find ways to use the county brand in stores and restaurants.

Going forward, the county has up to \$90,000 in grants in place from Rural Economic Development, Eastern Ontario Development and from its own funds. The money will be used to "find opportunities between existing agriculture businesses and those available in emerging trends and markets."