

There are many benefits to local branding

It is an old adage that "if you are looking for a helping hand...try the end of your arm...". On the complex range of challenges facing Canadian agriculture, there may be one solution to a range of problems that is very close at hand indeed.

Of late, we have learned of a myriad of concerns relating to food that has buffeted Canadian consumers. Cheap food imports—largely unlabeled and uninspected produce—and a wave of high volume competition has hit in areas unprotected by supply management. Large retail food chains—which operate on large sales volumes and low margins—leave precious little income for the product that leaves the farm gate and for all those who work, plant and harvest.

Concern about the quality and safety of imports from China has been caught on pet food imports recently, and food imports from other countries of origin are potentially of concern. On the other hand, a new interest in organic food has made many high-quality, but non-organic, farms assess their own marketing strategy.

Recent submissions to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry's study on rural poverty voiced the frustration of many that vendors arrive at farmers' markets with goods to sell that are neither local or even Canadian—even though they might technically meet Agriculture Canada's "Canada" label requirement.

One "helping hand" for many of these problems would be a determined local labeling, promotions and branding program, one that would allow local agricultural regions to label, promote and brand local lamb, beef, pork,

Michael Chong



vegetables, dairy, poultry, eggs, fruit as well as other products like maple syrup, honey, grains, corn and first stage locally processed products like cheese, sausages and the rest.

By and large, federations of agriculture across Canada are organized on local basis—usually by country or region. It would be a relatively simple program for the federal government to provide funding for local F of A chapters to have local products, produce and agriculture branded. The success of very high priced food stores focusing only on the best quality possible, combined with the ever increasing importance of food safety, tells us all that the value of local branding could be very compelling. Certifying provenance would enable Canadians to buy and eat local products.

Canadian consumers increasingly want to know the origin of their food. An increased market demand for Canadian produced food can be seen in the recent announcement by the Toronto restaurant chain Il Fornello to offer local menu choices entirely made with locally grown food sources. These premium-priced menu items are desired by consumers because of the added flavour, nutrition and "provenance".

"Wellington County Beef" or "Leeds County Eggs" or equivalents for other products and counties would inform consumers where their food dollars are going. It could help invigorate a farming community which is being depopulated far too quickly in ways that will seriously diminish any Canadian food self sufficiency in the future. Combining this promotional engagement with an advanced Canadian Food Inspection Agency focus on the proper labeling, regulation and inspection of imported food products would send a powerful message to Canadians—both consumers and farmers—that Canadians and their government are committed to a strong, high-quality, local food sector right across Canada.

The days of food as a volume commodity are simply not consistent with the present obsession with climate change, fuel efficiency and food quality. Shipping broccoli from China or even Mexico based on next-to-zero labour costs, without regard to the environmental footprint of the shipping fuel and storage energy, not to mention the unknown food safety and other input standards, makes little sense.

Selling food as a commodity will always be part of the industry. But empowering consumers to make an informed choice through a better labeling regime that identifies foods produced and processed in Canada would strengthen the Canadian farmer and consumer.

—Michael Chong is the MP for Wellington-Halton Hills and can be reached at chongm@parl.gc.ca or at 866-878 5556

Town considers stop sign to slow construction traffic in subdivision

In an attempt to slow down speeding construction traffic, Ward 3 Councillor Moya Johnson requested the installation of a stop sign in the Meadowglen subdivision in northwest Georgetown.

"The construction traffic, from the

new subdivision being built at the top of the hill, is traveling at quite fast speeds down the hill and past the developed portions of the subdivision," Johnson said, describing the situation on Meadowglen Blvd. at Herb Wild St.

Due to the urgency of the situation,

council waived the procedural bylaw and approved Johnson's motion for a staff investigation into a stop sign immediately.

Town staff will report back on the feasibility of installing the stop sign at a future meeting.

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