

# Wide variety of agricultural innovations shared at Halton Region's forum

**23**—The research centre conducted on-farm trials last year and subsequent taste testing in an effort to find the "Ontario sweet potato."

"Screening can give us a faster way to get varieties and make them available to our growers," said Brownbridge.

Another unique market showcased at the forum came in the liquid variety. The Toronto Distillery Company was on hand to talk about how it's taking Ontario-grown organic grains and distilling them into whiskey.

"Growers now have the opportunity to showcase their crops in a giant marketplace like the LCBO," said Toronto Distillery Company co-founder Charles Benoit. "I just think the opportunity is really tremendous." Unlike other distilleries, the new company is labelling its bottles with specific information on the crops used to produce the whiskey.

"I think we're at the beginning of something really exciting," he said. "Before, farmers didn't plug into the spirit market, but they will now."

While gluten-free products are cer-



Representatives of the agricultural industry hear about new innovations at the Halton Region Agricultural Forum. *Michael Ivanin / Special to the Champion*

tainly all the rage these days, a family company in the small town of Heidelberg, ON has been creating these types of specialty items for

decades. Kevin Stemmler, co-owner of Stemmler Meat and Cheese, told the audience about how his family's busi-

ness made its way into the niche market that caters to diets free of gluten, MSG, lactose, nitrates and other allergens.

"This type of meat didn't exist in the '80s when we started," he said. "So how do we develop this market? Of course, we innovate."

For example, he said they use turkey, beef and pork collagen instead of soy in their products in response to soy allergies.

"There are a lot of innovative things we can do to help ourselves," he remarked.

Those in attendance also learned about the large variety of government funding opportunities available to the agricultural and food sectors through a presentation from Mentor Works, a consulting firm that assists farmers in accessing these funds.

For forum guests like Meaghan Richardson, co-owner of Mabel May Farms in north Burlington, the evening proved to be very informative.

"This certainly showed us where we can go with a good idea," she said.

"There are definitely niches out there that Halton farmers can fill."



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