

Northeast Community Network (NeCN) Releases Preliminary Findings of Agriculture Study

Smooth Rock Falls, ON: The Northeast Community Network in partnership with the University of Guelph recently initiated a research project to assist in stimulating agriculture development and local food production in Northeastern Ontario. This study worked to identify best practices in planning and development for entrepreneurs and municipalities that are willing to aggressively pursue ways and means of creating and maintaining sustainable agriculture businesses.

Over the recent months, Professor Wayne Caldwell and graduate student Eric Marr from the University of Guelph were in the region gathering information and researching current agriculture practices in the NeCN catchment area. Individuals contacted were pleased to participate and provided relevant, meaningful information to the study.

"Through this research we spoke with many farmers, and many community leaders. The results build on the opinions and input from many interested participants." said Professor Wayne Caldwell, University of Guelph. "I'm very impressed with the commitment of the farm and municipal sector to agriculture within this area. There is much potential and much opportunity to work together to enhance this sector for years to come."

Two main reports were produced by the University of Guelph. The first report entitled *Current and Future Opportunities for Agricultural Development in Northeast Ontario: A Regional Development Perspective* provides an overview and SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, threats) analysis on the current agriculture sector in the area.

The second report *Strategic Direction for Agricultural Development in Northeastern Ontario* provides specific actions to assist current and future entrepreneurs to plan initiatives to boost agriculture within the NeCN region. In total 22 actions were identified and range from increased marketing initiatives to increased financial support to farmers for local food production.

"The relatively inexpensive cost of farmland in the north is a real advantage for beef and dairy production and for certain crops such as hay, cereals and certain oilseeds. We also noted real potential for growth in the local food, fresh market sector." said Professor Caldwell.

Partnerships and participation at all levels and aspects in the NeCN catchment area will be key to moving the actions forward to implementation.

"The NeCN has developed a partnership with Guelph University and Professor Wayne Caldwell. We will certainly continue to work at developing stronger linkages and communications with other agriculture-

based organizations in Northern Ontario. Working together, I see a very bright future for our ability to feed our families from food grown and raised in Northern Ontario. It's coming together!" said Mike Milinkovich, Black River Matheson Mayor.

Results of the study will be applied across much of the NeCN region in the Cochrane District where local economies are often impacted by the "ups and downs" of the mining and forestry industries. Economic benefits of this study may include but are not limited to new investment in Northern Ontario, job creation, economic diversification and the growth of local food production.

"The North East Community Network and its Agriculture Steering Committee received strong support for our work toward significantly boosting agriculture within Cochrane District from the Mayors and Reeves at a recent NEOMA meeting in Cochrane." said Ellen Sinclair, NeCN Ag Steering Committee Chair.

The Northeast Community Network was able to undertake this study thanks to the University of Guelph providing the time and resources necessary to complete the research and the following CFDC's who provided funding through the Local Initiatives Contribution Fund: The Venture Centre, Nord-Aski, North Claybelt and Kirkland & District Community Development Corporation.

The full University of Guelph final report is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2012 and will be made available to the public.

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BACKGROUNDER: Northeast Community Network

The Northeast Community Network (NeCN) is an incorporated, not-for-profit organization. The NeCN promotes a collaborative approach in developing new opportunities to enhance economic development within the region and to coordinate applied research in support of forestry, mining, agriculture and tourism business development.

The NeCN coordinates regional projects that promote the integration and expansion of local economic development into a powerful regional cooperative model to help transform the economic landscape of Northeastern Ontario along the Highway 11 Corridor. In essence, the NeCN attempts to create one voice for economic development within this region of Northeastern Ontario.

One of the major regional initiatives that the NeCN coordinated was the creation of an Agricultural Land Inventory identifying unused and underutilized private lands within the member municipalities that is now stored within a GIS data base.

The NeCN have already completed three phases of studies to evaluate the capacity of our region to produce in an economical fashion. The 1st phase established the volume and description of available public and private land within the geographical region. Phase II concentrated on a market study and phase III provided a Gaps/Needs Analysis of the great Northern Claybelt region.

Previous study phases identified “what” and “where” about the available land and it’s potential. This proposed research study by Guelph University will now focus on “what can we do with this land” and, “what do we need to have in place to encourage new farms and establish new farm-related businesses”?