

WORKING PAPER

Marketing and Social Media Strategies for Local Food Literacy Campaigns

Lessons Learned from Greenbelt Fund Grantees

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to provide an overview of strategies deployed by four grantees – with financial support provided by the Government of Ontario, in partnership with the Greenbelt Fund – including the Ontario Apple Growers, Ontario Pork, Veal Farmers of Ontario, and National Farmers Union – Ontario, to increase awareness and customer retention of their Ontario grown food products in order to provide other commodity groups with a resource for viable marketing and social media strategies. While some organizations used similar strategies, many of the approaches taken and activities implemented are unique to each organization, reflecting the different approaches that can be used to capture greater market opportunities.

2. ONTARIO APPLE GROWERS



The Ontario Apple Growers (OAG) is the provincial organization representing 230 apple farmers in Ontario. Officially incorporated under the Farm Products Marketing Act in 2004, the OAG's established mandate focuses on four key areas including; Government Relations, Grower Information, Industry Competitiveness and Consumer Promotion. There are approximately 16,000 acres of apples planted across the five growing regions in Ontario with a farm-gate value of approximately \$90 million (three-year average, 2012 – 2014).

OAG's project, *Strength in our Core Value: Ontario Apple Awareness* sought to maximize consumer food literacy by highlighting the benefits, versatility and availability of locally grown Ontario apples. This was done through a comprehensive awareness campaign that focuses on utilizing strategic consumer influencers.



Various activities and strategies have been utilized to improve the overall success of the campaign, including working with Food Bloggers of Canada, Public Relations and Social Media consultants, and utilizing pre-existing special events such as the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. As this campaign was media focused, the activities undertaken consisted of social media

contests and Twitter parties, recipe e-books, blogs, adverts in print media, TV, and event-type activities. While the project was administered by one part-time employee, the project saw considerable success in terms of scope and engagement.

Through this media-focused food literacy campaign, *Strength in our Core Value* threw two Twitter parties. A Twitter party is a live chat on the social media platform which connects

participants around any given topic. Twitter parties can be a strong marketing opportunity for businesses, a quick way to grow social media reach and to engage in dialog with current and potential customers. These parties had roughly 250 participants, reached over 457,000 people and led the OAG's branded hashtag, #ONappleAday to reach the top 5 most trending hashtags in Canada during both conversations.

Accumulatively, over 20 million media impressions resulted from the Twitter parties. A central component of OAG's campaign was the use of a single, clever hashtag that seamlessly connected each of their activities. #OnappleAday was used across platforms to enable people to easily engage with OAG, and allow OAG to easily analyze its reach. *On apple a day* is easy to remember due to the classic saying, "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" while also invigorating the hashtag with Ontario pride. Complementing the use of a single hashtag, OAG also focused heavily on promoting the Foodland Ontario 'Good Things Grow in Ontario' brand campaign to direct more consumers to buy Ontario apples. Using a simple, easy to remember, and catchy hashtag, as well as leveraging the familiar Foodland Ontario brand, is a great social media strategy.



Similarly, through this project OAG sought to bring more traffic to their Instagram page @ontarioapples by launching a social media contest. Each month from October 2016 to June 2017, Ontarian Instagramers were invited to follow and tag @OntarioApples and post a photo on the social media platform that depicted how they eat #ONappleAday for their chance to win a \$50 prize pack, which included cooking utensils that are often used to cook, decorate or eat apples (such as a slicer, apple cutter and muffin trays). This not only gave them a large source of photos of Ontario apples to share across media platforms, but also increase consumer engagement. The campaign enabled OAG to attract over 600 new followers to their Instagram page.

Through their food literacy campaign, OAG collaborated with 10 influential food bloggers to increase wide-scale promotion of Ontario grown apples. Media influencers (including the 10

bloggers) were invited on tours of Ontario apple orchard farms and packing and storage facilities to provide them with a fulsome appreciation for apple production from farm to consumer. To make this as successful as possible, OAG with financial support from the Greenbelt Fund, paid for the attendants' transport (a bus), food (cooked with Ontario grown apples), and offered resources for them to take home. It was anticipated that this strategy would inspire and encourage media to spread the word about Ontario grown apples, reaching over 100,000 Ontarians.

Each blogger was tasked with creating 3 recipes that included Ontario grown apples. These recipes (30 in total) were then put together in a beautiful recipe e-book that can be found [here](#). The recipes range from snacks, sides, desserts, and mains, including many meals you would not think to include apples in such as, "apple and smoked gouda beer bread", "bacon apple cheese ball", and "beer braised pork and apple stew".



While all of the graphics in the e-book are beautiful, many bring focus to the use of the apples in the dish, sending a visual signal to viewers. Furthermore, recipes are inclusive of an array of

dietary needs, including gluten free, raw, and vegan, promoting a range of people to utilize the book when looking for new recipes. Lastly, some recipes in the e-book include specific apple varieties grown in Ontario. This is a solid strategy for making Ontario grown apples stand out and promoting them over the competing export varieties. Similarly, the [OAG's website](#) offers photos and details of the variety of apples grown in Ontario and offers suggestions for how to utilize their flavour.



In addition to the recipe e-book, the 10 influential bloggers accumulatively published 40 blog posts that featured Ontario grown apples. Since many of these influencers engaged with multiple topic areas on their blogs, OAG could extend their reach to an array of demographics. For example, one of the bloggers, Melanie Cote, mentions in the recipe e-book that she “writes about food, parenting, neat stuff and the unexpected beauty in life”. Therefore, people who frequent Melanie’s blog from across these interest groups were exposed to promotional materials related to Ontario grown apples. Moreover, as most people visiting food blogs have an interest in finding new food ideas they serve as viable potential consumers.



OAG also launched a Spring TV Media Tour, where blogger and Registered Dietitian Carol Harrison was featured on the TV segment offering recipe demonstrations from the new digital recipe book, offering tips on how to identify Ontario apples at the store, proper storing techniques, as well as promoting the nutritional, economic and environmental benefits of purchasing Ontario grown apples. In [one episode of Rogers TV](#), Carol focused on how apples can make wonderful holiday party treats, gifts,

and even a movie night snack. Promoting recipes with Ontario grown apples during Christmas time was also a smart way of promoting how Ontario apples are available year around.

These influential strategies enable consumers to hear about the benefits, versatility and appeal of Ontario apples from media personal rather than the message coming from OAG's themselves. This promotes people to purchase Ontario apples as the advertisement is coming from somebody they trust, enjoy engaging with, or even just from continuous exposure. Targeting an array of outlets, including social media, TV, blogs and as it will be seen below, print media, offers consumer exposure to Ontario apples on a variety of fronts, further increasing their exposure and likelihood of supporting OAG's project objective.

The last set of activities deployed in OAG's *Strength in our Core Value* project was promotional advertisements and activities at in-person events and in print media. More specifically, OAG chose select events to sponsor, including the Food Bloggers of Canada Conference and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. The FBC Conference is Canada's only national conference dedicated to food blogging which also attracts lifestyle, parenting and travel bloggers. With a cap of 150 attendees, it is designed to be an intimate gathering of Canada's best and most active food bloggers providing one-on-one networking opportunities between bloggers and brands. At the FBC Conference, Ontario apples were featured in appetizers and the dessert at the event, while apple samples were also available. Full page recipes using Ontario apples were also provided in conference brochures.

Additionally, Ontario apples were featured on a video advertisement placed at Toronto's Dundas Square and throughout the PATH system – a largely underground downtown pedestrian walkway. Combined, advertising in these two areas offered OAG a reach of over 750,000 people daily. Lastly, OAG had a full page advertisement in Horizon Food Magazine, which is inserted in the Toronto Star with an estimated readership of 226,000 people, and was also mentioned in Foodism Toronto – one of the largest independent food and drink publications in Canada, distributing 50,000 copies a day.

To sum, these activities have accumulatively provided Ontario Apple Growers with millions of impressions (i.e. people engaging, in some way, with their content) from an array of platforms and their use of various approaches, such as direct consumer engagement, advertisements, and different media sources.

3. ONTARIO PORK



Set Ontario Pork represents the 1,284 farmers who market 5.39 million hogs in the province. The organization is engaged in many areas, including research, government representation, environmental issues, consumer education and food quality assurance. Ontario Pork is the first livestock commodity group in the province to set social responsibility benchmarks, demonstrating pork producers' commitment to sustainable farming. Ontario's pork industry "farm to fork" generates \$2.7 billion in economic output and 17,015 in

full-time equivalent jobs.

Through the *Ontario Pork Consumer Outreach* project, Ontario Pork used a multi-faceted approach to promote greater consumer awareness of under-utilized pork cuts and their cooking methods. The objective was to drive consumption at the retail level, promoting higher pork purchases, higher carcass utilization and less waste resulting in better returns for retailers and processors. In addition to increasing awareness of alternative pork cuts and cooking methods, the project sought to promote pork as a healthy protein option that tastes great and is highly versatile.

To achieve this, Ontario Pork targeted various stakeholders to engage with such as health professionals, food and nutrition bloggers, and youth educators. Since the objective of the project reflects that of Ontario Apple Growers, many approaches, and activities undertaken were similar for both commodity groups. For example, both launched new recipes, encouraged consumers to engage with their product in new ways, collaborated with bloggers to spread the word about their products, and attended strategic events to promote their products. Because of this commonality, some activities undertaken by Ontario Pork will not be discussed in this report, though were still effective approaches at engaging pork consumers.

Ontario Pork developed six recipes through the consumer outreach project, two of which were specifically for consumers with health issues. As a protein-rich meat, Ontario Pork sought to utilize the nutritional benefits of the meat to drive its campaign and increase consumer retention. Ontario Pork also launched six recipe videos on their YouTube channel. While many consumers enjoy reading print or online recipes with vibrant photos, others prefer the step-by-step guidance offered in video recipes, enabling Ontario Pork to extend a greater reach.

Check out Ontario Pork's, Look for the Logo Video [Here!](#)



Since a key objective of the project was to increase awareness of under-utilized pork cuts, these were the cuts used in the recipes developed. For example, one short video recipe on Ontario Pork's YouTube channel shows how to cook an easy Healthy Pork Burrito Bowl using pork shoulder. Total views to date are more than 39,000 for this video.

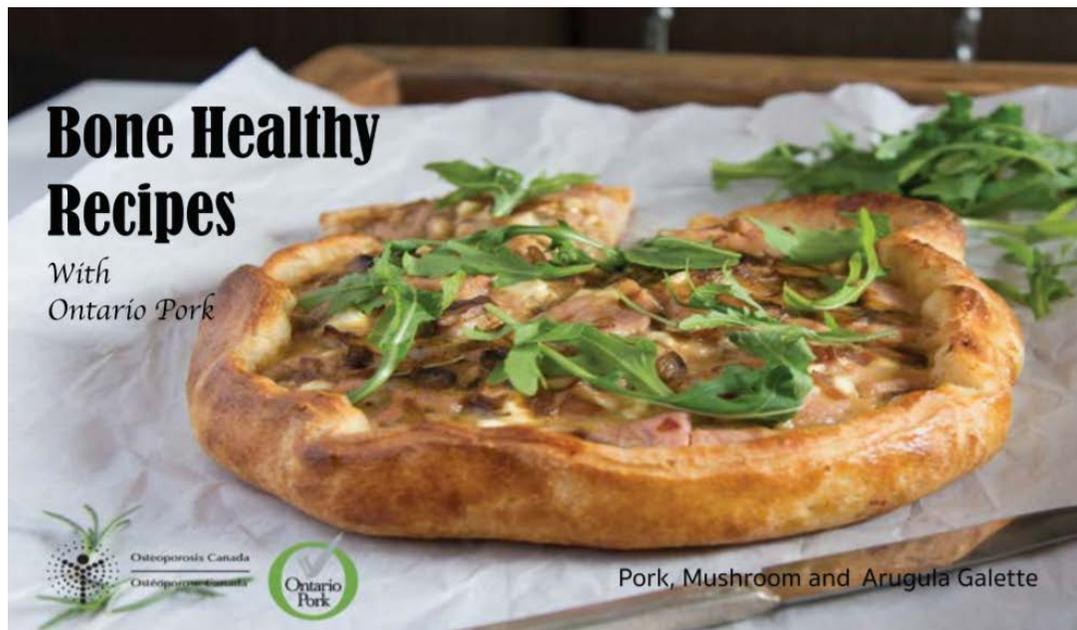


Ontario Pork also put together a webinar on pork recipes and nutritional information for 76 dietitians and health care professionals to offer resources and up-to-date information on the health benefits of pork. The topic was 'Protein and Healthy Aging' and had two speakers: Dr. Wendy Ward, professor in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University, and Dr. Stephanie Chevalier, Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine at McGill University.

As well, Ontario Pork developed three healthy living factsheets: "Protein, Pork and Healthy Aging"; "Protein, Heart Health and Pork"; and "Diabetes, Protein and Pork". These were distributed to 2,595 dietitians across the province.

Through their multi-faceted approach, Ontario Pork developed strategic partnership promotions with health and wellness associations including the Heart & Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Diabetes Association. The recipes discussed above were designed in collaboration with these partners expertise. Additionally, Ontario Pork participated at and sponsored central events held by these partners, including the Ride for Heart (a 14,000-person event) and the Heart and Stroke Clinical Update (over 620 attendees).

They also produced a [healthy pork recipe booklet](#) in collaboration with Osteoporosis Canada to create greater awareness of how pork can contribute to good bone health.



Furthermore, many new families look to instil healthy eating habits into their children at an early age. Ontario Pork completed three cooking demonstrations at Early Year Centres to appeal to this market segment. New parents came to learn heart healthy recipes and children were excited to sample the foods prepared; 15 adult participants attended each demonstration (not including their children!).

Ontario Pork also worked with children directly through a cooking demonstration at Gateway Drive Public School in Guelph. Through this activity, a grade 1 class (roughly 20 students) engaged with the Ontario Pork nutritionist on healthy eating, the four food groups, and how to make well-rounded meals. Additionally, the nutritionist cooked an easy 20-minute meal for the class to eat, with students contributing where possible. A total of 11 cooking demonstrations were conducted, reaching 137 individuals including Ontario Early Years Centres, schools and seniors. Recipe cards and Ontario pork nutritional information were handed out at each event.

4. VEAL FARMERS OF ONTARIO

The Veal Farmers of Ontario is a producer-run organization representing grain-fed and milk-fed veal farmers dedicated to promoting and enhancing a viable and competitive Ontario veal industry. VFO represents one of the smaller, perhaps lesser known red meat commodities in Ontario.



Research has shown that consumers are very receptive to eating Ontario veal, but are unsure how to prepare it, what recipes to use, and are not confident in their cooking skills for a higher priced protein item. At the same time, the veal parmigiana sandwich is a classic, much-loved food item found in restaurants, grocery stores, and in many Ontario homes. It provides an authentic veal eating experience while also acting as a “gateway” recipe for consumers who don’t cook with it at home.

The project, *Ontario’s Best Veal Parmigiana Sandwich* sought to capture this opportunity by launching a veal parmigiana sandwich competition. The competition included restaurants, grocery stores, and family favourite recipes, impacting awareness, education and sales of local, Ontario veal across these sectors (the home, retail, and food services). Judges of the competition came from influential media outlets which significantly increased the promotional strength of the event.

The Best Veal Parmigiana Sandwich competition enabled Ontario Veal Farmers to extend the social media ‘work’ onto others and allowed people to have their own conversations about Ontario veal. For example, it gave bloggers, news outlets, community newspapers and local tourism outlets a solid piece of news to cover. Also, for the 50 restaurants and local eateries registered in the competition, it acted as a way for them to reach out to their own potential clients and to advertise their establishment and veal sandwiches – which further supported the consumption and awareness of Ontario veal. This is especially true for the establishments that made it into the final rounds of the competition – they can still promote that they won this province-wide competition, which will encourage consumers to try their Ontario veal sandwich.

Check out the Veal Farmers of Ontario Project Summary Video [Here!](#)



5. NATIONAL FARMERS UNION | ONTARIO



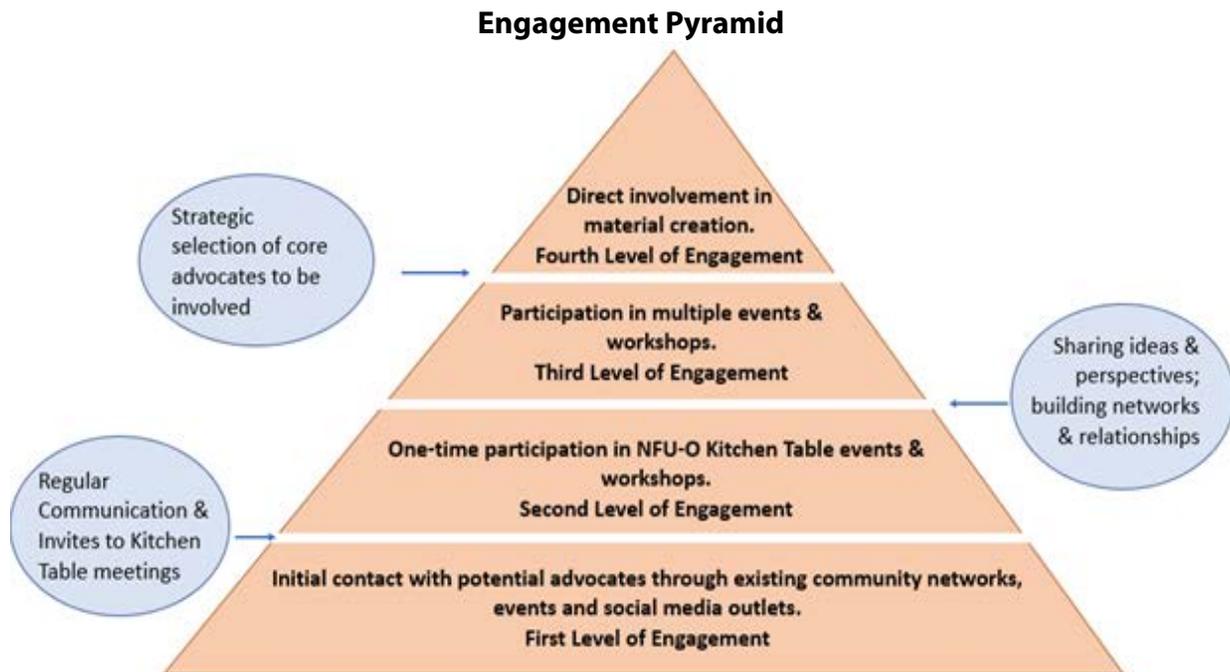
National Farmers Union | Ontario

The National Farmers Union – Ontario (NFU-O) is an Accredited Farm Organization representing thousands of sustainable family farmers in Ontario and has advocated for farm families across Ontario and Canada since 1969. Members work together to achieve agricultural policies that ensure dignity and income security for farm families while protecting and enhancing rural environments for future generations. The NFU-O collaborates locally, nationally, and internationally to research, educate and share effective solutions that lead to a better world for farm families and their local communities.

The NFU-O, with financial support from the Greenbelt Fund, launched a project titled *Building a Network of Local Food Advocates* to drive peer-to-peer promotion of local food and ultimately increase consumer outreach. The project is still being implemented, so some strategies discussed herein have not yet been rolled out or are in the process of implementation.

Rather than addressing consumers directly, the project plans to engage authority figures who have influence over consumers including educators, academics, healthcare professionals, faith-based community members, outdoor professionals, authors, artists and musicians. Even though these stakeholders are not directly involved in food production or advertising, they are powerful advocates for sustainable local food in their own communities. *Building a Network of Local Food Advocates* is fundamentally about creative systemic change by engaging local food champions and making them more effective in promoting their communities support of viable local food systems and to make choices that benefit sustainable farming. The primary target is to build strong advocates within the Greater Toronto Area, with secondary efforts taking place in Kingston, Guelph and Peterborough.

The NFU-O will bring these influencers together to create connections and resources that would make them effective local food advocates. The project will utilize an 'engagement pyramid' to bring influencers into the NFU-O's work and enable them to engage as advocates at the level of commitment that reflected their capacity, interests, and skill-set. The pyramid method will also allow the project team to utilize their resources for comprehensive advocacy building only on those influencers who demonstrated a commitment to the project by moving up the pyramid; saving time, money and energy.



Through these engagement events, NFU-O will work together with influential stakeholders to improve their understanding of local agriculture, their connection to the local food system, and their advocacy skills in promoting local food in their own communities, organizations and professions. Moreover, NFU-O will work collaboratively with the advocates to design and assemble materials that could be used by the advocates to better promote local food both up and downstream, as well as horizontally to their peers and professional networks. This could include tailored advocacy resources that reflected the needs, interests, and contexts of each of the advocate’s community.

Similarly, NFU-O will create advocacy materials that highlight the universal benefits of promoting local food systems. For example, the project team plans to engage with healthcare professionals on the benefits of a fresher diet, and ask these advocates how local food can permeate their community more effectively. Further, they plan to create resources that demonstrate how climate change (a universal issue) can be mitigated through expanding local food systems, both broadly and specific to each community. The objective of developing the advocacy resources, techniques, and communities is to support advocates to be as effective and successful within their communities as possible.



In order to achieve project goals, NFU-O will use their website, pre-existing events (i.e. farmers markets), and their wider community networks to bring people into the first level of the engagement pyramid. Their goal is to connect with over 500 people within this first level. From there, kitchen table meetings, workshops, and discussions will be held, with the goal of reaching over 130 participants from over 10 influential communities. Through continuous engagement (third level) NFU-O worked with the advocates to acquire pre-existing advocacy materials to build on.

Rather than primarily focusing on social media to promote potential advocates entrance into the engagement paradigm, the NFU-O will strongly rely on pre-existing networks and events to actively recruit new participants. This may be a more time effective approach for organizations with limited capacity to maintain a strong social media presence.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As it was seen throughout this report, each grantee took a different approach to engage influencers of consumer food decisions. NFU-O is working with influential leaders such as health care professionals, educators, faith-based communities and artists to build their capacity as advocates of a local food system. Recognizing that different actors have varying capacities to advocate for their local food system, the NFU-O will use the engagement pyramid to enable people to engage in varying capacities, and to determine which stakeholders would be the most important and beneficial in supporting the design of their advocacy resources. These resources have universal as well as specialized components, so that each interest group (healthcare professionals, educators, faith groups) have enough at their disposal to effectively engage their communities and advocate for local food.

Alternatively, OAG's launched a strong multi-media campaign to engage consumers indirectly and directly through both their own organization and through influencers such as bloggers and TV recipe shows. Their use of twitter parties and Instagram contests was an interesting technique to get people engaging with OAG as well as with one another about Ontario grown apples. OAG used a single hashtag that transcended platforms, beautiful visual imagery of meals cooked with apples, and worked with a team of influential food bloggers to reach new demographics. Ontario Pork used interactive media such as YouTube recipes, food demonstrations with youth directly and their caretakers, and partnered with well-known giants in the health promotion sector such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Moreover, the Veal Farmers of Ontario placed emphasis on one specific activity: a veal parmigiana sandwich competition. Through the competition, participating food spots and media influencers were able to take the competition into their own hands to spread the word amongst their networks and potential customers. The competition was a huge success in providing opportunities for people to begin talking about Ontario veal, trying it when they go out to eat, and cooking it in their own home.