

Farm and Food Care – Year in Review

By Jessica McCann, Communications Coordinator, Farm & Food Care Ontario

Thanks to the support of Platinum members like Egg Farmers of Ontario (EFO), Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) and its partners were able to execute major projects in 2023 that brought egg farmers, food producers and agribusinesses together with consumers to interact, answer questions and learn more about what it means to farm in Ontario.

Platinum members are foundational to FFCO's successes, and enable the organization to continue working to build public trust on behalf of all of Ontario agriculture. This year FFCO and EFO partnered on several in-person activations as well as virtual initiatives to spark conversations and answer consumer questions about eggs and egg farming in Ontario. Janelle Cardiff serves as Vice Chair of the FFCO Board of Directors as nominated by EFO.

Three Breakfast on the Farm (BOTF) events were held across the province. This year, BOTF events took place in Huron County, on a Napanee dairy farm and on a Brussels sprouts farm near Chatham.

2023 was an exceptional year for FFCO's

on-farm tours with a record 10 tours taking place across the province. This included hosting three tours for more than 70 food influencers and Registered Dietitians as well as four Culinary Student Tours that help form connections with more than 145 of tomorrow's chefs and food influencers.

In September of 2023, 45 culinary students and faculty from Centennial College went to see an egg farm. In addition to this, each of the 145 students and 50 food influencers and registered dietitians that attended a farm tour in 2023 were able to take home at least one egg related item, including egg cookers, spices, shopping lists, and reusable bags.

Tour participants were surveyed on their knowledge and perceptions of Ontario agriculture before and after each tour.

Pre-tour impressions of Ontario agriculture, 65% responded good or excellent, while post-tour survey results showed an increase to 93% who responded good or excellent. This shows the value of an in-person tour experience.

FFCO unveiled the sixth edition of The Real Dirt on Farming in November of 2023. The booklet is available in English and French and was reviewed by EFO staff prior to going to print. In early 2024, a digest version will be available, a digital educator resource will be released this winter by Agriculture in the Classroom Canada, and a new 4-H manual is in development by 4-H Ontario.

Eggs and egg farming are key areas of focus in publication. This edition tackles questions on food waste, food insecurity and labelling as well as avian influenza in relation to human health and food safety, diets of poultry, as well as transportation and animal welfare.

The Real Dirt on Farming also acknowledges the important role groups such as EFO play in supporting food banks. FFCO congratulates EFO on receiving the Paul Mistele Memorial Award for its contributions to Feed Ontario member food banks across the province last year. The award was presented to EFO Chair Scott Helps and Zone 6 Director Sally Van Straaten at the Harvest Gala in November.

FFCO returned to the CNE with an 'Ask-a-Farmer' video booth and spent the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair sharing FarmFood360 virtual tours - including virtual egg farm tours - with the public.

Over the year, the online Faces Behind Food campaign told the stories of 79 individuals from a diverse cross-section of commodities and answered 38 'Ask a Farmer' questions while garnering over seven million impressions on Instagram and Facebook. EFO saw a significant presence in the Faces Behind Food project this year with 11 profiles collected from the poultry show as well as with interviews and photoshoots conducted at both Gray Ridge Egg Farms and Burnbrae Farms. Egg farmers also answered several 'Ask a Farmer' questions.

In 2023 FFCO, in partnership with AgScape, hosted 17 virtual field trips. In June students virtually toured an egg farm and learned how hens are cared for, and how eggs are collected, cleaned and packaged. These virtual trips reached more than 83,869 people and continue to be a unique and accessible way to bring agriculture to audiences across Canada.

FFCO continues to offer media and Speak Up training. 46 presentations and training sessions were facilitated in 2023 and continue to be available for member organizations and industry groups with commodity-specific content created for each.

16 Livestock Emergency courses were held in 2023 for 339 firefighters and first responders across Ontario. The three-year total is 1,112 trainees taking the course online or in-person. The course offers training for first responders being called to livestock transportation emergencies including truck rollovers. It covers factors critical to the decision-making processes for accidents involving livestock trailers, including trailer design, animal behavior, laws and regulations, euthanasia protocols, and how to develop response teams.

FFCO also responded to 13 Animal Care Helpline calls in 2023, working with commodity groups on cases of concern such as animals on the loose and provision for animals in extenuating circumstances.

To learn more about all of FFCO's initiatives, visit www.FarmFoodCareON.org and subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter. Comments and questions can always be directed to FFCO staff directly at info@farmfoodcare.org