

# ONTARIO MARKET INVESTMENT FUND

## *Building opportunities for Ontario-produced foods*

The OMIF program is targeted to promoting consumer awareness of Ontario-produced foods and encourages Ontarians to buy locally.

### **Local Foods, Culinary Arts and Fine Dining Attracting Thousands to Muskoka and Parry Sound Region**

It used to be the towering pines, the sparkling lakes and the call of the wild that enticed people to the magic of Ontario's Muskoka/Parry Sound region north of Toronto.

Now, people also come from far and wide to savour the region's bounty of indigenous foods, superlative culinary arts and fine dining thanks to the marketing and educational initiatives of the Savour Muskoka project. And there is much to feast on from the many small, family-operated market farms in the area. The rich soils and the climate are ideal for lettuce, corn, tomatoes, arugula, Japanese greens, and root vegetables.

Savour Muskoka is a partnership of local growers and food producers, world-renowned Muskoka chefs, culinary artisans, restaurants, caterers, retailers and the accommodation industry to promote the region as a dynamic culinary tourism destination and provide consumers with a wide selection of culinary products and experiences.

Partnerships and promotions are two of the key ingredients for the initiative's success since it was introduced in 2004. Add to that assistance from the Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF), and Savour Muskoka now has even greater reach.

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*– James Murphy*

According to James Murphy, general manager for Savour Muskoka, the organization had a down-to-earth goal when it sought assistance from the fund – quite simply, to increase farm sales. The contribution of \$50,000 from OMIF helped fund four projects designed to reach that goal: the development of a culinary map of the region; creation of a marketing collateral piece; showcasing of local products and culinary talents at numerous events throughout the area; and a market research component.



The region's first-ever culinary map features all 90 members of Savour Muskoka including 35 farms, 40 restaurants and numerous culinary artisans. More than 30,000 copies were distributed through local Chambers of Commerce, Rotary clubs and tourism offices throughout the region and as an insert in the Toronto copies of Muskoka Magazine. The map indicates the best way to reach members, be it a phone call to place an order from a local farmer or a visit to a restaurant. It also directs readers to the website and encourages people to send in feedback.

More than 12,000 re-useable cotton Savour Muskoka shopping bags were produced, and they are now sighted all over the region. One side of the bag sports the organization's logo and the other features the names and phone numbers of 10 members who shared the costs of producing the bags, including local farmers, retailers and restaurants.

A menu of tantalizing events was introduced and thousands of people visited events in Bala, Huntsville, Rosseau, Baysville and Milford Bay that highlighted local farms, chefs and culinary artists and educated people about the importance of buying locally.

"OMIF has been excellent. It is really helping small market farmers, local organizations, producers and others in the food business and is raising public awareness about the importance of buying locally," says Murphy. "We're finding that people want to know where their food is coming from. They're keen to talk to farmers and learn more."

The array of food products and culinary activities is gaining appeal according to James. Cottagers, day-trippers and local residents alike are getting out and about the region to meet chefs, dine on local foods and buy from farmers as a result of the marketing efforts.

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The Savour Muskoka partners are also expanding their support of communities throughout the vast area by contributing to food banks and organizing other initiatives to help those in need. "We've had great success to date thanks to the dedication and drive of our members and programs like OMIF". Murphy adds "We want to grow with our communities and create stronger relationships with them for our longevity and sustained success."

## **Ontario Market Investment Fund**

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