

# 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.

### **Savour Stratford Perth County – A Script for Success and Sustainability**

Stratford may be best known for its world-renowned theatre productions, but this southwestern Ontario city and the surrounding area are also producing world-class food and culinary experiences.

Award-winning local chefs and locally-grown food – from fruits and vegetables, artisan cheeses, meats, fish, poultry and maple syrup products – are getting sensational reviews from the thousands of visitors who head to Stratford and the rolling countryside and communities of Perth and Huron counties each year.

The recognition is due in large part to the creation of the Savour Stratford Perth County project.

When the province's Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF) was announced in 2008, the Perth County Visitors Association partnered with a number of other tourism and agricultural partners in Perth and Huron counties to seek support in developing the area as a premier, year-round culinary destination.

What began as a concept to promote the area's authentic and diverse offering of local culinary products and talents became a winning script that gained support from OMIF.

According to Cathy Bieman, General Manager of the Perth County Visitors Association, the goal of Savour Stratford Perth County is to get visitors and local residents alike to understand the importance of supporting local producers and to help those local producers market their products. Bieman says "The OMIF program is fabulous. It has truly helped us to meet our goal."

Savour Stratford Perth County brings together farmers, culinary artisans, restaurateurs, the area's renowned chefs, and accommodation establishments in a number of creative ways to promote local foods that support businesses and farmers alike.



**A variety of produce grown in Perth County**

As a start, the partnership staged a Food Summit in March 2009. More than 200 farmers, chefs, hotel owners and others gathered to share ideas on how to market local farm products and get them from the field to the fork in local eateries.

One way was to create a logo, which is now used on all promotional materials for Savour Stratford Perth County. It features all the products produced by partners in the alliance as well as a fork and knife that represents the artistry of local chefs and other culinary artisans.

***“Our vision is to create lasting and sustainable partnerships from the field, to the chef, to the guest – and we’re now well on our way.” – Cathy Bieman***

They established an “Epicurean Trek” that offers a guide and a map to 20 mouth-watering stops through the towns and countryside of the area – from organic vegetable farms, apiaries and a fish hatchery to tantalizing bakeries, a tea shop and a local winery and candy shops – all of them featuring local produce.

Some 50,000 copies of a new and improved “Huron Perth Buy Local, Buy Fresh” map were printed and are now distributed throughout the area. It is winning applause from many visitors who can now find 108 farms and 21 restaurants showcased on the map. In order to participate, restaurants must sign a contract promising to use a minimum of three local products.

In spring 2009, the partnership introduced three culinary destination packages that include overnight stays in the area and a chance to sip, sample and savour local products. The packages have become among the top destination packages promoted by Ontario Tourism.

The past year was a very busy season Bieman says. “We were able to be involved in local events to educate lots of visitors about the area and its great food, because of the OMIF support.” There was the Slow Food Event on a hog farm in Perth County, the new Taste of Listowel Festival starring local restaurants and specialty shops that use local products and the Perth County Plowing Match where people take in the plowing contest then enjoy a big dinner of local food.

And then, there was the feature show – the Savour Stratford Perth County Festival in September 2009. The crowds were bigger than ever, as was the number of participating local farmers.

“The local food movement is really growing in Perth and Huron counties,” says Bieman. “We’ve also had an explosion of media coverage with at least 30 feature articles in the Ontario media.”

The appreciative reviews will likely grow as the partnership continues to promote Savour Stratford Perth County. One of the most unique aspects of their work is the business-to-business database that recently went live. It links local chefs to more than 55 local farmers. Farmers post the products they have available and chefs can gear their menus to what’s available – and searches can be done by product, by season or by farmers’ names.

“We absolutely would not have been able to launch this without the help of OMIF,” says Bieman. “Our vision is to build on the success OMIF has helped us achieve and create lasting and sustainable partnerships from the field, to the chef, to the guest – and we’re now well on our way.”

## **Ontario Market Investment Fund**

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