

BWDSB /BGCSB ANNUAL COMMUNITY PLANNING & PARTNERSHIP MEETING

BRUCE FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE PRESENTATION

Bruce Federation of Agricultural is pleased to have this opportunity to participate in this planning and partnership meeting. BCFA represents a large percentage of the agricultural & rural families in Bruce County and appreciates the opportunity to bring their input forward to this meeting.

Certainly the major concern of the rural residents of Bruce/Grey is the trend towards closing the smaller rural based schools and transporting these rural students to large urban based schools. We appreciate the possible efficiency and possible improved economics of these mega schools however they come at a huge hardship to our rural families and students. These rural students are forced to spend increased bus times traveling to and from school. This travel time also often restricts these students from participating in extra curricular school activities. Again, we do appreciate the boards financial challenges but our rural families and students are not second-class citizens and deserve the same access to schools and school programs as our urban friends.

We greatly appreciate the BWDSB commitment to retain the Agricultural Course at Chesley . However the decision to not provide bussing to this school has resulted in greatly reduced rural student participation, because many students that are interested in enrolling in this course do not have a way to get there. The Agricultural program in Chesley is excellent and very important to the progressive agricultural industry that has evolved in Ontario currently. We strongly encourage BWDSB to continue to fully support the Chesley Agricultural program ,that includes providing transportation availability for those students enrolled.

We also want to emphasize the need for the entire Ontario educational program to emphasize and prioritize the need for more general agricultural training and awareness for all students. Now with less then 2% of our population directly involved with production agriculture ,there is a large and growing portion of the population that has a lack of knowledge and understanding about where food comes from and how it is produced. Unfortunately, there is also an ever-growing amount of miss information regarding modern agriculture in general. BCFA strongly believes that the educational system has a duty to provide all students

with a basic education in modern farming systems and food production. This should be promoted by this school board, particularly given the importance and status that this County enjoys in regards to Ontario's agricultural production statistics.

The agricultural sector is also seeing a growing shortage of skilled labour. Agriculture has developed over the past several years into a hi-tech industry. Electronic guidance systems, robotics, computers, drones, genetic engineering, animal health and welfare, etc., have become important components of most farm operations and farm support industries. Presently every student graduating from an agricultural course offered by the University of Guelph has 4 job offers. The majority of these jobs are well paid, high tech jobs in agronomics, nutrition, computer tech, robotics, animal health, etc., etc. BCFA is very pleased to have hosted an Ag Careers Day for the past two years in conjunction with the Chesley Ag Fair, with excellent participation – over 300 students attended this year. Feedback from students has been excellent with a common theme – “I didn't realize there were that many different job opportunities in agriculture.” It is imperative that our education system embrace and promote the value of agriculture to our economy and encourage students to investigate the career opportunities in agriculture and agri-related business.

BCFA thanks you for this opportunity to present some of our concerns and opportunities that the agricultural industry believes you need to be aware of.

Les Nichols
President, Bruce County Federation of Agriculture
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