



Taste Northern Ontario Case Study

A Case Study of Taste Northern Ontario, a delegation of eight businesses that attended the Restaurants Canada Show 2018

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Possibility grows here.



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Executive Summary

In 2017-18, the Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN), a division of SSM Innovation Centre, and Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA) formed a partnership to organize a delegation of northern Ontario businesses to attend the Restaurants Canada Trade Show 2018. The purpose of the delegation was for northern Ontario agri-food businesses to have increased opportunity to expand their businesses through building relationships with other businesses in the agri-food value chain. The RC Show is Canada's largest foodservice trade event that happens annually at Exhibition Place (Enercare Centre) in Toronto, ON. The eight businesses that participated included: Algoma Highlands Wild Blueberry Farm (Algoma), Bay Meats Butcher Shop (Thunder Bay), Belly Artisan Ice Cream (Muskoka), Fromagerie Kapuskoise (Cochrane), Penokean Hills Farms (Algoma), Purvis Fisheries (Manitoulin), Quinta Quinoa (Nipissing) and Thornloe Cheese (Temiskaming).

RAIN assisted businesses with assessing their needs and liaising with RC Show staff and service providers. Partners assisted six of these businesses with creating print materials, which included brochures, banner ups, recipe cards and business cards for the event. Partners reached out to 20 companies to alert them about the upcoming Taste Northern Ontario delegation. The RC Show was steadily busy for businesses to make connections with the industry. There were some opportunities for product placement including having Quinta Quinoa featured at the Garland Canada Culinary Competition. Vikram Vij of Dragon's Den stopped by to show his support for Quinta as one of their investors. All the vendors had something unique to offer, which included new products they were showcasing. All the businesses had professional presented booths, which included new banner ups, sell sheets, brochures and recipe cards.

The Taste Northern Ontario delegation to the RC Show was deemed as a success from the participating businesses. Over 423 contacts were made by the businesses, which has already resulted in \$376,500 sales to date (an average of \$47,000 per business). On average each business made 53 contacts, and followed up with 45% of them. Businesses will follow up with 24% of additional contacts made later this year. Businesses project that they will have an increase of \$656,400 in 2018 sales because of participating (an average of \$94,000 per business). One business said that this event helped them create new distribution lines that will increase their reach to all of Canada. When asked about job creation, the businesses said that they expect to hire approximately 7 FTE positions because of the increased sales.

Some suggestions for RC Show 2019 included:

- Additional advertising for businesses at the event.
- Inclusion of the businesses in some of the events during the Show

From the perspective of the organizer, there would need to be a more streamlined process to get businesses registered to the RC Show 2019. In the future, it would be beneficial to register each business and know their exact location within the floor plans. It would also be beneficial to have a service provider involved in designing, creating, storing and setting up signage that can be used in multiple years for the Taste Northern Ontario delegation.

Introduction

In 2017-18, the Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN) and Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA) formed a partnership to organize a delegation of northern Ontario businesses to attend the Restaurants Canada Trade Show 2018. The purpose of the delegation was for northern Ontario agri-food businesses to have increased opportunity to expand their businesses through building relationships with other businesses in the agri-food value chain. This exposure would result in the expansion of businesses to increase sales channels and distribution opportunities. The intent was to have these northern businesses become recognized by the agri-food sector for the unique products that they develop.

Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN)

The RAIN is a division of Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre (SSMIC), based in Sault Ste. Marie (Algoma), ON. RAIN's vision is to build a resilient agri-food sector in northern Ontario through innovative research and agriculture development projects. The SSMIC is a non-profit organization which functions as a catalyst for economic development and diversification in the science and tech sectors in Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma.

Restaurants Canada

Restaurants Canada is a national, not-for-profit association representing Canada's diverse and dynamic restaurant and foodservice industry. Restaurants Canada members comprise 30,000 businesses in every segment of the industry, including restaurants, bars, caterers, institutions and their suppliers. Restaurants Canada works on their behalf with all levels of government in support of a strong restaurant industry that contributes jobs, investment, and a wide range of culinary choices to communities across the country.

Restaurants Canada Show (RC Show)

The RC Show is Canada's largest foodservice trade event that happens annually at Exhibition Place (Enercare Centre) in Toronto, ON. In 2017, the event was attended by 16,257 hospitality professionals, restaurateurs and buyers. It provides an opportunity to shop for innovative equipment, products and services. The RC Show provides an excellent opportunity for agri-food businesses to meet prospective buyers in the industry.

Taste Northern Ontario

With a goal of increasing market opportunities for northern agri-food businesses, the Partnership wanted to understand how northern agri-food producers were selling and promoting market-ready products. The Partners were particularly interested in increasing relationships between northern Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) market.

Taste Northern Ontario Survey

In July 2017, the Partnership did a survey with 14 of 52 northern agri-food businesses that met at least one of these criteria:

- Have attended trade shows in the past (Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and Festivals)
- Had market-ready products that were available in restaurants or retailers
- Had plans to pursue sales to restaurants/retailers

- Made products available outside of their District

The list of businesses was generated through the Partnership's network, including past participants of FedNor's Northern Pavilion at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

Taste Northern Ontario Survey Results

- 89% of businesses were already selling products into the GTA market
- 89% of businesses had capacity to expand sales into GTA, southern Ontario & Eastern Ontario
- Of those businesses selling outside northern Ontario, it represented 46% of average annual sales
- 7 of businesses were very interested in targeting food service & hospitality sector, followed by the 6 interested in grocery or retail sector, 4 to consumers and 3 to food distributors.
- 8 of businesses were very interested in attending the RC Show, 5 in the Gourmet Food & Wine Expo, and 4 in SIAL Canada (Food Innovation Show).
- Some businesses noted that they would need upgrades/purchases to meet higher demands.
- Businesses were spread out over northern Ontario evenly between Northwest and Northeast

These businesses expressed that they were interested in attending the RC Show, but cost of travel and staff time were barriers to participating. With this information collected, the Partnership decided that it should target its efforts to get agri-food businesses to have a delegation at the RC Show February 25th to 27th 2018. To make this opportunity a reality, the Partnership needed some funds to assist businesses with the cost to participate.

Greenbelt Fund Partnership

With information gathered from the survey, the Partnership put together a funding proposal to Greenbelt Fund to enable northern Ontario agri-food business participation in the RC Show for a project called *Taste Northern Ontario*.

The Greenbelt Fund is a non-profit organization, supports and enhances the viability, integrity, and sustainability of agriculture in Ontario and Ontario's Greenbelt. It delivers support to farmers and local food leaders to ensure more of Ontario products are being served and distributed through public institutions, retail, and foodservice markets. The Greenbelt Fund administers the Local Food Investment Fund, a grant program funded by the Government of Ontario.

The Partnership issued a request for Letters of Intent (LOI) from interested businesses in August 2017 to attend the RC Show. In this LOI, the businesses stated their interest in attending the show, what products they could offer, their level of experience with trade shows, and their commitment to cover partial funding costs.

With eight interested businesses, the Partnership applied for 50% cost-share funding for businesses to attend the RC Show. These costs included accommodation, vendor fees, booth setup and materials. Funding was confirmed in November 2017 for participation in the RC Show to assist with the cost of this initiative, to the amount of \$25,000 from the Greenbelt Fund.

The eight businesses that confirmed participation included: Algoma Highlands Wild Blueberry Farm, Bay Meats Butcher Shop, Belly Artisan Ice Cream, Fromagerie Kapuskoise, Penokean Hills Farms, Purvis Fisheries, Quinta Quinoa and Thornloe Cheese. For more information on the businesses and the products they produce, see Appendix 1 – Taste Northern Ontario Participating Businesses

Partnership Goals:

- Assist 8 northern Ontario agri-food and beverage businesses to attend the Restaurant Canada show for the food retail and service sector and present their products with a cohesive package (trade booth, presentation media and materials) under a Taste Northern Ontario brand
- Collaborate with northern partners to promote and recruit northern agri-food & beverage businesses for the show

Outcomes:

- Create 3,000 contacts and establish 100 new business partnerships between northern agri-food and beverage businesses and buyers in food service sector
- Establish 20 relationships between distributors or brokers and northern businesses
- Develop established trade show presence for 8 businesses to use at additional shows

Results:

- 3 start-up and 5 existing agri-food & beverage businesses that will expand
- 8 northern food brands that will be exposed to a national audience
- Increased awareness of Greenbelt programs in northern Ontario

RC Show Preparation

Partners recruited 8 businesses to be part of a Taste Northern Ontario delegation to the Restaurants Canada Show on Feb 26-28th 2018. RAIN assisted businesses with assessing their needs and liaising with RC Show staff and service providers. RAIN also assisted six of these businesses with creating print materials, which included brochures, banner ups, recipe cards and business cards for the event. RAIN arranged to set up 8 businesses with setting up storage, electrical, freezer equipment, signage, furniture and furnishings for the RC Show. These businesses were set up within the Ontario Pavilion in a Taste Northern Ontario section with eight booths (each 10'x10'). RAIN arranged to get additional signage and a print ad for Taste Northern Ontario was designed to be displayed for the RC Show.

Partners received and assisted 8 businesses with creating sell sheets for the RC Show. Partners reached out to 20 companies to alert them about the upcoming Taste Northern Ontario delegation. RAIN gathered information from each business for the Rhizome Institute that was sent out to additional companies through Greenbelt Fund's network.

Partners held monthly calls to discuss activities to set up for the RC Show. Partners promoted the upcoming RC Show and participating businesses on Twitter and Facebook.

Challenges from the preparation of the Show have included little communication between some of the businesses, which makes it difficult for planning. Some businesses later delegated preparations to other staff and communication was a lot smoother. RAIN did weekly check-ins with some of the businesses that needed extra assistance. Another challenge was the setup of the Taste Northern Ontario section as ordering services were difficult. This was a result of the RC Show registration system assigned the Partners as exhibitors for one large section, which wasn't properly broken down into individual businesses. When it came time to ordering services for these individual booths, the service providers did

not have a clear understanding of the setup. It was decided that RAIN would attend the setup day of the RC Show to ensure that all services and equipment has been secured for the Show opening on Sunday.

RC Show Execution

Partners and businesses arrived for setup on Sat Feb 24th. Move-in procedures went smoothly for all the businesses that arrived for setting up. There were a few issues with services that were ordered to the wrong places within the Taste Northern Ontario section. RAIN staff was there on Saturday to sort out the issues with service providers before carpeting was laid down before the opening RC Show on Sunday. All the businesses received the services necessary, including cooler/freezer storage and catering.

The RC Show was steadily busy on Sunday through Monday for businesses to make connections with the industry. Since the section was located next to the Ontario Craft Brewery section, there was a steady flow of people coming by. There were some opportunities for product placement throughout the RC Show. Quinta Quinoa was featured at the Garland Canada Culinary Competition where their quinoa was in the black box competition on Sunday. Vikram Vij of Dragon's Den stopped by to show his support for Quinta as one of their investors.

All the vendors had something unique to offer, which included new products they were showcasing. Thornloe Cheese featured grilled cheese made with their new grass-fed cheese & butter that just recently launched. Belly Artisan Ice Cream had a tasting bar of their unique ice cream flavours. Purvis Fisheries had bite-sized fried whitefish & lake trout. Other products showcased for tasting included jerky (Bay Meats), moose sauce (a horseradish/blueberry sauce from Algoma Highlands) and artisan cheese (Fromagerie Kapuskoise).

The RC Show also offered many opportunities for Exhibitors to listen to informative speakers within the industry and to network. The RC Show was not as busy on the last day of the Show, but it did provide an



Purvis Fisheries from Manitoulin Island



Quinta Quinoa featured at the Garland Chef Competition



Nick Gordon from Penokean Hills Farms

opportunity for Exhibitors to engage one another. Only a few of the northern businesses attended other events that were tied to the RC Show, including the opening reception and Breakfast of Champions.

All the businesses had professional presented booths, which included new banner ups, sell sheets, brochures and recipe cards. Recipe cards were designed and printed by NOFIA and Pam Hamel (Thornloe’s Brand Ambassador), which showcased the different products of producers in the Taste Northern Ontario delegation. Penokean Hills Farms had a display fridge that showcased their beef and attracted buyers.



Thornloe Cheese - Grass-Fed Cheese & Butter

RC Show Evaluation

The Taste Northern Ontario delegation to the RC Show was deemed as a success from the participating businesses. After the RC Show, RAIN administered a survey with the eight businesses to learn about their experience and any direct results from participation. All the eight businesses participated in the survey.

The overall experience at RC Show was rated as excellent or very good by the businesses. Each business was very satisfied with the organization of the delegation, graphic design services, accommodations and services provided at the RC Show.

Many contacts were made by the businesses, which has already resulted in \$376,500 sales to date (an average of \$47,000 per business). Some of the contacts that were made include the following businesses where there will be resulting sales impacts:

- CN Tower 360 Restaurant & Retail Shop
- ClubLink Golf Courses
- Metro
- 100 Mile Food Services Ltd.
- Gordon Food Service
- Compass Group
- Cara Operations Ltd.
- Canadian Forces
- Meatings BBQ
- Jacob’s Steakhouse

In total, the participating businesses made 423 contacts. On average each business made 53 contacts, and followed up with 45% of them. Businesses will follow up with 24% of additional contacts made later this year. Businesses project that they will have an increase of \$656,400 in 2018 sales because of

Table 1 – Resulting Immediate Sales of Participating Businesses Mar-Apr 2018

Sector	\$
Food service	\$ 50,800
Distributors	\$ 270,600
Retail	\$ 50,100
Other	\$ 5,000
Immediate Total Sales	\$ 376,500

Table 2 – Resulting Projected Sales of Participating Businesses in 2018

Sector	\$
Food service	\$ 178,000
Institutions/BPS	\$ 1,000
Distributors	\$ 427,000
Retail	\$ 50,400
Total Projected Sales (2018)	\$ 656,400

participating (an average of \$94,000 per business). One business said that this event helped them create new distribution lines that will increase their reach to all of Canada.

The activities will lead to job creation as expressed by the participating businesses. When asked about job creation, the businesses said that they expect to hire approximately 7 FTE positions because of the increased sales. These positions include administrative and other production/processing staff.

Press coverage of the Taste Northern Ontario delegation was covered by the Sault Star on April 13th (<http://www.saultstar.com/2018/04/13/algoma-food-producers-hope-toronto-show-opens-doors--and-cupboards>). Coverage of the delegation on Twitter was also a highlight with: 12 tweets, 157 engagements, over 10,000 impressions and 16 mentions.

Improvements for RC Show 2019

Half of the businesses said that they would like to participate again in RC Show 2019. Others said that they could see themselves attending every three years to increase interest in the sector over time. One business said that from the contacts that were made from this Show, they may be at their capacity to produce. Most businesses said that a 50% cost share works for future participation as it is costly for businesses and staff to travel from northern Ontario.

Some suggestions for RC Show 2019 included:

- Additional advertising for businesses at the event. It was difficult finding businesses on the RC Exhibitor Map and Guide Book because they were labeled as SSM Innovation Centre (SSMIC).
- Inclusion of the businesses in some of the events during the Show, which include Chef's Competitions, Speaker Events and Breakfast of Champions.
- Encouraging participating businesses to take notes on leads so that they would have specific information to follow up on instead of a stack of business cards

From the perspective of the organizer, there would need to be a more streamlined process to get businesses registered to the RC Show 2019. In the future, it would be beneficial to register each business and know their exact location within the floor plans. It would also be beneficial to have a service provider involved in designing, creating, storing and setting up signage that can be used in multiple years for the Taste Northern Ontario delegation. This signage would help delineate Taste Northern Ontario from the rest of the Ontario Pavilion so that there is some recognition with trade show participants. Another idea is to have an increased presence of Northern Ontario breweries that want to expand their businesses in southern Ontario. Since Taste Northern Ontario was right beside Ontario Craft Breweries, it is an opportunity to showcase northern wine, spirits and beer.

Conclusion

When the Partners were putting together the funding proposal, we expected to see a total sales increase of \$500,000 and 100 new value chain partnerships. We have demonstrated that the delegation to the RC Show 2018 will exceed the expected sales impact by \$156,000, and has engaged 190 new value chain partnerships. We also did not expect that there would be 7 new FTE positions created through this delegation. The Taste Northern Ontario delegation to the RC Show has exceeded our expectations for the resulting sales impacts of the businesses. The RC Show presents tremendous value for creating value chain partnerships and economic impact for the agri-food sector.

Appendix 1 - Taste Northern Ontario Participating Businesses

Algoma Highlands Wild Blueberry Farm: Located off the shores of Lake Superior in Wawa, Algoma Highlands has operated since 2006, harvesting over 400 acres of wild blueberries and strawberries. Family owned and operated, the farm offers fresh, frozen and quality assured products year-round. Algoma Highlands offers fresh wild blueberries in August, frozen wild blueberries, wild blueberry juice and preserves. **Contact:** Trevor Laing, Owner info@algomahighlands.com www.algomahighlands.com

Bay Meats Butcher Shop: Located in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Bay Meats Butcher Shop is an OMAFRA-licensed Free-Standing Meat Plant with a state-of-the-art smokehouse. All products are gluten free, filler free, and when possible, preservative and nitrite free. A variety of products: Beef Jerky, Pepperettes, Kielbasa, Bacon, and a variety of smoked sausages. All products are available in retail and bulk packaging. **Contact:** Cindy Salo, Owner cindy@baymeats.com www.baymeats.com

Belly Artisan Ice Cream: Founded by Shelley Westgarth, Belly Artisan Ice Cream is an all-natural artisan Jersey Milk Ice Cream Company located in Huntsville, Muskoka. With 22 signature food service flavours, Belly features unique flavours like blueberry cheesecake, scotch whiskey and basil lemon. 4L and 11.4L tubs are available for food service. Products have a 6-month shelf life after opening (12 months sealed). **Contact:** Shelley Westgarth, Owner bellyicecreamcompany@gmail.com www.bellyicecreamcompany.ca

Fromagerie Kapuskoise: Founded by François Nadeau and his family, Fromagerie Kapuskoise specializes in artisan cheese and is in Kapuskasing. The Fromagerie produces cheese with French traditional methods. Some cheeses include: the Kapuskois, inspired by the Morbier; the Opatatika, inspired by the French Tomme; and the Mattagami, inspired by the Cantal. **Contact:** Denis Nadeau, Representative fromageriekapuskoise@gmail.com www.fromageriekapuskoise.ca

Penokean Hills Farms: From Algoma, Penokean Hills Farms raises, finishes and butchers their own branded beef for the wholesale and retail market in Ontario. Their premium, all-natural quality beef is raised free of added hormones and any unnecessary antibiotics. Penokean's two product lines are Pea-Barley Finished Beef (grain-finished) and 100% Grass-Fed Beef. **Contact:** Nick Gordon, Sales & Marketing Manager info@penokeanhillsfarms.com www.penokeanhillsfarms.com

Purvis Fisheries: Purvis Fisheries is a 5th generation family owned and operated fishery on Manitoulin Island. All fish are caught wild in Lake Huron and processed the same day in a CFIA/QMP registered fish plant. Purvis offers Whitefish, Lake Trout and Herring that are available whole, dressed, in fillets, or smoked that are vacuum packed to seal freshness. **Contact:** Denise Purvis Sheppard, Sales & Marketing Manager contactus@purvisfisheries.com www.purvisfisheries.com

Quinta Quinoa: Quinta Quinoa specializes in growing and preparing high quality, local, gluten free crops such as Ontario-grown Quinta Quinoa. Quinoa varieties are grown using best practices by Canadian farmers focusing on producing quinoa of the highest quality and purity. **Contact:** Jamie Draves, President & CEO jdraves@katan.ca www.quintaquinoa.ca

Thornloe Cheese: Small batch cheese makers of goat and cow milk cheeses located in the Temiskaming Valley, the little clay belt region of Northeastern Ontario. Pride of the North since 1940 the company makes premium cheddars, poutine curds, blue and brie style cheeses and in 2017, Thornloe became First in Canada to produce Verified Grassfed cheddar, mozzarella and butter. Retail and restaurant ready products. **Contact:** Pamela Hamel, Brand Ambassador grandfromage@thornloecheese.ca www.thornloecheese.ca