Showing why agriculture matters in Middlesex

If you want to make a difference, you have to be at the table. That's what drives Joanne Fuller to ensure agriculture gets an audience with decision makers in the counties she represents as an OFA Member Service Representative (MSR).

Joanne joined OFA in 2016 after a career in municipal government. "I grew up on a farm and the MSR role provides a great opportunity to blend my country roots, community connections and municipal background," says Joanne. "I'm very passionate about Ontario's agri-food sector. It's an exciting industry and I enjoy educating people about it and the employment opportunities that are available."

In her day-to-day role, Joanne helps OFA members in Middlesex and Lambton counties with any number of issues they face in their farm businesses – connecting them with resources on issues, such as government programs, planning, drainage, tax rates, mental health and animal activism. She also works with the boards of the Middlesex and Lambton local federations to advance agriculture through education, advocacy and partnerships.

She's particularly excited about initiatives that showcase the importance of agriculture and its economic benefits.

At the local level, Joanne is involved in a successful partnership with the Middlesex County Economic Department, the London and Strathroy Chambers of Commerce and the Middlesex Federation of Agriculture where they work on many initiatives together. The annual spring and fall agri-tours invites municipal councils, local chamber members and others interested in investment, education and employment in the region on a one-day tour of the county's diverse agri-business sector. The tour visits various parts of the county each year, and typically attracts more than 50 participants on each tour.

"The tour showcases agriculture as a vibrant and vital sector for Middlesex County, bringing county staff and elected officials out of their offices to visit local agri-business," says Joanne. "It's a great way to bring a diverse group of people together – politicians, university and college representatives, and social service partners – making connections that benefit the entire county and really opening their eyes to our sophisticated businesses."

This grassroots tour unites multiple partners to focus on jobs, youth, how to attract residents to the community – and most importantly, keeps agriculture as the common connection. "We showcase farm-based businesses to demonstrate the value and opportunities at a local level," says Joanne.



Joanne Fuller, OFA Member Service Representative.

It's a model that can be replicated anywhere in the province. Joanne encourages others to reach out to their local economic development department and Chamber of Commerce to explore ways to highlight the value of agriculture to the local economy, as a way to continue to attract youth and new residents to the sector and strengthen the local community. "It's important to show why agriculture matters to our local communities. Touring decision makers around their own county to experience firsthand what the agricultural sector offers creates a personal connection which builds commitment and understanding." OFA