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Consumers crave more local markets

The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation has started the Greenbelt Farmers' Markets Program aimed at attracting more Greenbelt farmers to the growing number of markets in the region.

The Foundation is investing \$200,000 this year to boost the size of markets and the range of local products sold with the aim of increasing financial returns for Greenbelt farmers.

The foundation met with market managers to determine how to increase the success of these markets and found more farmer participation was the No. 1 need.

Public demand is outgrowing the number of markets and the number of farmers at those markets.

In a recent poll conducted by the Greenbelt Foundation, 42 per cent of respondents specifically shop at their farmers' market for local foods, and 91 per cent say if given the choice, they would prefer to buy local.

The farmers' market is the answer to two of the top concerns of Ontarians: food security and food safety.

The Greenbelt is essential for securing a local food source. It produces, if none was exported, enough food to feed all of Ontario. And getting to know where our food comes from, shaking the hands of those who harvested it, goes a long way to settling people's minds on the issue of food safety.

The Greenbelt Foundation will continue to expand this program and roll out further initiatives in anticipation of the 2008 harvest season. The program will also look at strengthening the relationship between the local municipality and the farmers' market.

For more information or to become a participating grower in the Greenbelt Farmers' Markets Program, please contact Laura Alderson at (416) 960-0001, ext. 303 or lalderson@OurGreenbelt.ca.

