



Youth Leaders Energized for Change

(Guelph, ON – May 1, 2009) - Fifty high school students from across Ontario are geared up to make a Bushel Basket of Change in their communities after their participation in the three-day 4-H Greenbelt Youth Forum.

The Forum, held at the YMCA Cedar Glen facility in Bolton from April 16-19th, integrated rural and urban high school students from across Ontario. Through facilitated discussions, group work, guest speakers and tours, the delegates developed leadership, public speaking and team work skills while concurrently exploring Greenbelt opportunities encompassing environmental stewardship, resource preservation, land use planning, and local food.

Enhancing the investigation were the daylong bus tours encompassing a variety of sites across the Greenbelt including a wind farm, a Blue Spruce tree farm, two vegetable operations in the Holland Marsh, a large family run dairy farm, Rattlesnake Point Conservation Area, the University of Guelph's Controlled Environment Facility and the Cheltenham Badlands.

Keynote presentations were made by Ann Gordon, the 'Through the Garden Gate' Afghanistan project manager for the Mennonite Economic Development Associates, Erin Charter from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Stephanie Crocker, Program Coordinator for EcoSource, Olivia Groninger, 4-H Ontario Ambassador, and the OTESHA Group. Other activities included the completion of an Environmental World Map where the delegates learned about how the world's population, wealth, resources and pollution were distributed. Following this activity each student assessed their own Ecological Footprint and brainstormed ideas on how simple life changes could lessen their environmental impact.

Evaluations from the students showed that the weekend helped them learn about the Greenbelt, appreciate local food and farmers, shed barriers and develop self confidence. Comments from evaluation forms included:

- "This has honestly been one of the best experiences of my life. I am a different person now, and I love it!"
- "I am going to try to keep the 'new me' alive.
- "Being a leader doesn't always mean talking. Sometimes you have to listen too."
- "You have inspired me to work hard and to stick to my future goals."
- "I am empowered to make changes in my life."
- "I am going to try to purchase more local food. Farmers work so hard."

Energized with their new knowledge, skills and networks, the delegates now head home with the goal of tackling a "Bushel Basket of Change" project within their community or school over the summer.

The results of these “*Bushel Basket of Change*” projects will be showcased at the 2009 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair where the youth will gather and celebrate their successes. The Forum will again be offered in April 2010.

The program was a joint effort between 4-H Ontario and Me to We, with funding provided by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and Agrium.

Founded in 1999 by international spokespeople for change, brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger, Me to We is now the worldwide leader in empowering youth with leadership education, inspiration and action tools.

4-H Ontario is a program of leaders building leaders. Through a network of 1600 volunteers, and a dedicated staff team, over 6200 youth, ages 10-21 years, are provided with “Learn To Do By Doing” experiential opportunities to develop their competence, confidence, connection, character and caring skills. With projects encompassing all aspects of agriculture, food, health and the environment, 4-H community programs set the stage for members to access advanced leadership development opportunities at the regional, provincial, national and international levels. 4-H is the bridge between rural and urban youth providing them with opportunities of a lifetime.

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