

For not-for-profits, outreach and fundraising go virtual

When the COVID-19 pandemic first began six months ago, most agricultural organizations transitioned to the digital world relatively quickly.

And for the most part, it has worked fairly smoothly, notwithstanding ongoing broadband access and capacity issues.

For organizations that traditionally rely on face-to-face connections with their audiences, finding new ways to make that happen effectively has been more challenging. But the longer the pandemic goes on, the more creative and adaptable they're becoming.

The latest offering is Gala in a Box courtesy of Farm & Food Care Ontario. The organization, whose mandate is public outreach and trust, has hosted a large harvest gala event as one of its principal fundraisers for more than a decade.

So, simply cancelling it the way the organization had its two scheduled Breakfast on the Farm events earlier this year was not an option.

"Our members have been amazing at continuing to support us and letting us move funding from a cancelled event like Breakfast on the Farm to other projects to help keep us



AgScape has revamped its teacher resources for the 2020-21 school year, developing a new Virtual Camp and bringing its popular teacher ambassador program online.

going - and we've been watching others do virtual fundraising," says Executive Director Kelly Daynard.

Gala in a Box is being hosted Nov. 14, and instead of buying in-person event tickets, people can order a box of local snacks and drinks for delivery that they can share with their family or social bubble that evening while logging in to a virtual gathering.

Dairy farmer and speaker Andrew Campbell is hosting the event, which will include an auction, cooking demonstration, and presentation of the Paul Mistele and Farm & Food Care Champion awards.

"Boxes have been selling well; people seem keen on it," she

says. "I feel like everyone is experimenting to see what works, but initial reaction is positive; there is still need for Farm & Food Care to do its work."

Farm & Food Care's face-to-face public outreach work with food influencers and consumers has also fallen victim to the pandemic, but the organization's gradual, longer term shift to online resources and significant social media presence has been invaluable in the last six months.

Its virtual farm tour website, for example, recorded about three quarters of a million unique visitors in the first six months of this year, which is 13 times higher than the same period in 2019.

For Canada's Agriculture Day last February, Farm & Food Care teamed up with AgScape to offer Farm to Facebook, where four different farmers took over their Facebook page for a live farm tour and real-time question and answer session with viewers.

That experience came in handy during June's Local Food Week, when Farm to Facebook came back with live farm tours and a live cooking demonstration using products from all four farms.

"Over 50,000 people watched those videos over the week and although nothing ever compares to going to a farm in person, this made us realize there are some pretty cool, different ways to communicate with the public," she says. "I can't wait for an in-person Breakfast on the Farm again, but I also see a lot of organizations being very creative and a lot of amazing things happening. The longer everybody is in this, the better we get at it."

AgScape has transitioned almost fully into the online world with its classroom resources and programming,

and has been able to make new in-roads reaching parents who were suddenly thrust into home-schooling roles.

A new Virtual Camp experience launched this spring features interactive activities with curriculum connections for parents, teachers and students based around food and farming topics.

"We needed a new innovation for when no one was at school," says AgScape Interim Executive Director Nancy Tout. "It went very well, and we are still receiving requests from schools who want to register the entire school as well as parents who have registered their kids for at home learning."

As a result, AgScape has decided to keep the camp going as a resource for both in-school and at-home learning.

The popular Teacher Ambassador program which pre-pandemic let teachers book a speaker for an in-classroom presentation is now also available online and uptake has been brisk. Since geography is no longer a limiting factor, schools from anywhere in the province are able to participate for the first time, not just those with a trained ambassador in their area.

The six most popular modules were brought online first for the start of the school year with the remaining topics launching shortly. Many new schools are registering for the first time, as well as inquiring about other virtual program offerings, like the online escape room activities available for Ontario Agriculture Week in early October.

"The school year is different, and you can be paralyzed or look at how to do things differently - and the AgScape team has been very passionate throughout this transition," says Tout.

4-H has also been busy deter-



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mining how it can offer both its provincial and local club activities in COVID-friendly ways. According to Executive Director Christine Oldfield, local club volunteers in particular have stepped up to manage the transition, learn new skills, and champion online learning.

Some clubs, like those focused on livestock, are more difficult to bring online, but others that can be done at home more easily - like baking, for example - have been popular.

"Virtual is a good outlet for learning and skill development, but they do miss the social connection piece (of in-person events)," says Oldfield. "But we've been very lucky to have staff and volunteers that have been able to pivot, and that we have strong relationships with sponsors who have been flexible in supporting activities that are different than what they're used to."

Overall, 4-H's club membership is about half as many as last year, but with planning in the works for various scenarios in 2021, the organization is hopeful more youth and leaders will decide to rejoin.

"Part of this new world is here to stay, and the virtual offering will have a permanent place," adds AgScape's Tout. "Different can be good and we will come out of this figuring out how to do things differently to benefit the sector."

Catherine Knipe appointed to Veterinary Council

Catherine Knipe of Clarksburg has been appointed to a one-year term on the Council of the College of Veterinarians.

She is a consultant in global technology implementation and has served on the board of directors at the University of Guelph.

She is on the Milton Hydro Distribution board and has previously served on the Greater Toronto Airports Authority.



Kate Lennon-Davey of Rockwood showing off the cinnamon buns she made in week one of the Waterloo 4-H virtual Breadventure Club led by John Drummond.