



NORTHEAST BITES

Project Report



ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the Northeast Bites Initiative, provides some implementation recommendations for future years and outlines some best practices for Northern producers and processors to expand future markets.

Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance

Introduction

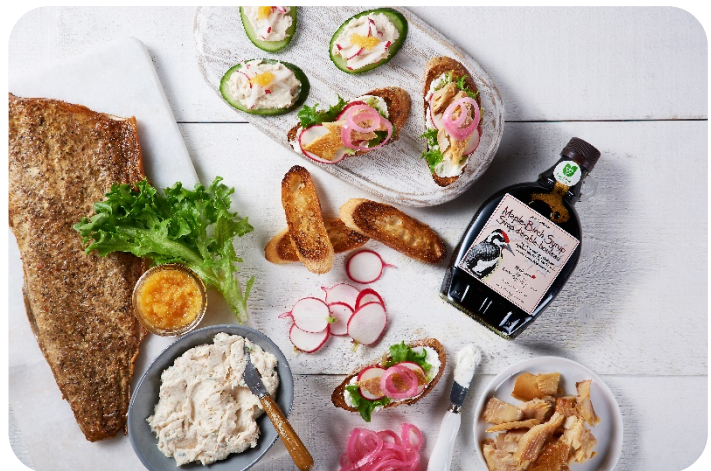
The Northeast Bites Initiative began in 2017 to develop cohesive, well-rounded recipes that focused on unique Northern ingredients. These recipes would be showcased at several events to connect consumers with local products and to help boost sales of Northern Ontario processors. This report summarizes the overall project, outlines implementation recommendations for future years and overall best management strategies for processors looking to access new markets and further connect with consumers.

Project Outline

Bilingual recipe cards were developed for:

- Parmesan frites, featuring Valley Growers Potatoes & Thornloe Cheese
- Turkey Meatballs in Blueberry BBQ Sauce, featuring Bay Meats & Algoma Highlands
- Roast Beef Sandwichers, featuring Bavarian Meats & Thornloe Cheese
- Mexican Quinoa Salad, featuring Quinta Quinoa
- Blue Cheese Bites, featuring Thornloe Cheese & Board's Honey
- Smoked Trout with Birch Syrup, featuring Purvis Fisheries & North of 49
- Bison & Cheddar mini-pies, featuring Bison du Nord & Thornloe Cheese.

These dishes, and others including beer-braised pulled pork sandwiches, charcuterie cones, sweet & savory tarts and bison sausage skewers, were showcased at North on Tap in Haileybury and the Foire Gourmande in Ville-Marie, with a direct consumer focus. Additionally, some of the products and the associated recipe cards were showcased at the Restaurant Expo in Toronto, with a focus on restaurants, grocery chains and distributors.



North on Tap

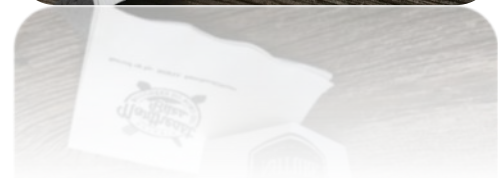
The 1st annual North on Tap Beer Festival was held on July 15th, 2017 in Haileybury Ontario. The event sold out with 1,000 tickets purchased and Northeast Bites coordinated the food for the event, in partnership with 8 vendors who served 11 dishes that highlighted unique Northern Ontario products. Sales for the event were just under \$7,000, with the bison-sausages, pulled pork sandwich, charcuterie cones and parmesan frites selling the most portions.

Most of the vendors at North on Tap were in the catering/restaurant business and developed a dish that highlighted a local product. Thornloe Cheese & Bison du Nord were the exceptions to this since they developed and served a dish based upon their own products.

For future participation at North on Tap and similar events, it is recommended that Northeast Bites have:

- Fewer vendors with a focus on a smaller number of dishes – while it was good to have a wide selection of dishes and vendors, the breadth of choice meant that fewer portions were sold at each individual vendor. With fewer vendors, each vendor can focus on a main and a side and vendor specific sales will be higher as a result.
- A coordinator on-site always. Representatives from NOFIA were on-site for the duration of the event to ensure that vendors had what they needed, to oversee health inspections, to take photos and to respond to media requests. This ensured a cohesiveness to the event.
- Vendors deal directly with the health unit. NOFIA coordinated the overall health permit for the event, but that lead to a longer inspection the day of. For future events, NOFIA will ensure that individual vendors connect with the health unit to facilitate a smoother day-of process.

The Northeast Bites initiative at North on Tap was very successful at boosting sales for the vendors involved but also showcasing some unique Northern products.



Foire Gourmande

The Foire Gourmande was held in Ville-Marie, Quebec on August 18, 19 & 20th, 2017. This event is a food festival specifically aimed at showcasing products and dishes. Northeast Bites coordinated a Northern Ontario pavilion with 6 vendors serving 8 dishes. Over \$45,000 was generated in sales, with top earnings from the bison tart, blue cheese bites, trout canapes and beer-braised pulled pork slider.

Some of the Northeast Bites vendors were in the restaurant business and developed dishes using local ingredients. Others were producers/processors and worked with NOFIA to develop recipes that highlighted their own products. NOFIA worked directly with a local caterer to prepare and serve a dish. NOFIA also partnered with College Boreal and their culinary program to develop two recipes and have their chefs on-site preparing and serving two dishes. This partnership was very successful and is a model that NOFIA will replicate at future events.

Attending the Foire Gourmande poses two major challenges. The first is that since the event is in Quebec, most of the communication, documents, permit requirements, etc. are in French and English-speaking vendors had difficulty accessing permits. In future years, it will be important the Foire Gourmande work with English vendors to help facilitate French to English translation, etc. Additionally, English attendees found it challenging and slightly unwelcoming at the event itself when all information is presented only in French. The second is the length of the event itself – with three full days, it can be difficult in sourcing manpower to work at the booths and to justify the cost of attending. Further, the event is trying to showcase full dishes rather than samples of products, which can be a barrier for producers/processors who have a product but don't have the ability to create a dish. The Northeast Bites initiative will be able to bridge this gap, but will continue to face the challenge of manpower.

For future participation at the Foire Gourmande and similar events, it is recommended that Northeast Bites have:

- Dedicated partnerships with organizations that can support the development and delivery of dishes. This could include College Boreal, Canadore College, ACFO, etc. This would support the inclusion of other Northern processors and producers who don't have the capacity to physically attend but want to expand their markets.
- Bilingual staff at the pavilion. Most of the staff working at the event only spoke English, which limited customer interactions. With more bilingual staff, deeper connections could be made with potential customers.

NOFIA/COLLEGE BOREAL PARTNERSHIP

NOFIA partnered with College Boreal and developed the 'Smoked Trout with Birch Syrup' recipe, featuring smoked trout from Purvis Fisheries in Manitoulin Island. This partnership and recipe illustrate the overall goal of the Northeast Bites Initiative. A unique Northern product was showcased in a well-rounded recipe that was developed by local chefs. After people tasted the dish at Foire Gourmande, they purchased a full smoked trout fillet and took a recipe card to recreate the dish at home. The recipe connected consumers with a product that could be difficult to incorporate on its own, boosting sales and awareness.

Restaurant Expo

NOFIA, in partnership with RAIN, coordinated a delegation of Northern Ontario processors to attend the Restaurant Expo to access new markets, specifically targeted towards larger, export-oriented markets. Rather than focus on the consumer, this show targeted distributors, wholesalers, restaurants and grocery stores. 8 processors attended, including:

- Thornloe Cheese (recipe provided)
- Quinta Quinoa (recipe provided)
- Purvis Fisheries (recipe provided)
- Belly Artisan Ice Cream
- Penokean Farms
- Algoma Highlands Blueberry Farm (recipe provided)
- Bay Meats Butcher Shop (recipe provided)
- Fromagerie Kapuskoise

Of these 8 processors, the Northeast Bites initiative provided 5 recipes and recipe cards (2 developed specifically for the Restaurant Expo) to support marketing and sales opportunities. At these type of shows, it is essential that vendors provide samples of their products – in some cases, the vendors couldn't showcase certain products and the recipe cards were able to mitigate this to an extent. In total, the vendors made 423 contacts and projected an increase of \$656,400 in 2018 sales.

For future participation at the Restaurant Expo and similar events, it is recommended that Northeast Bites and vendors:

- Have food samples that represent their line of products – for example, Thornloe Cheese served grilled cheese using their grass-fed cheese & grass-fed butter, which drew people to their booth and provided future customers with products new to the market
- Take detailed notes for each potential customer and pair it with their business card. This will make follow-up conversations more personalized and more successful, as the vendor can immediately reference the product lines, etc. that the customer showed interest in.
- Know the business and have easy to access support materials. Many customers asked detailed questions about products, supply & distribution, pricing strategies, etc. and having sales sheets on-hand was an easy way to ensure the proper information was shared with customers.

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

Sector	\$	\$ Average
Food service	\$ 20,800	\$ 6,933
Distributors	\$ 270,600	\$ 90,200
Retail	\$ 50,100	\$ 12,525
Other	\$ 5,000	\$ 1,666
Immediate Total Sales	\$ 346,500	\$ 69,330

Best Management Practices

The producers and processors involved in this project are all at various stages of size and distribution and have different goals and business strategies. Some are content meeting their current market needs and have no intention of increasing sales or product lines. Others are continuously adding new products, accessing new markets and working to grow their market share.

Within this project, several best management practices were developed to help Northern processors and producers access new markets and distribution conduits to elevate their sales opportunities.

Develop cohesive product plans – A cohesive product strategy, which could include recipe cards, how-to's, etc. will facilitate a stronger connection between the consumer and the product. This is especially important for products that are harder for the consumer to differentiate or to use in current cooking practices.

Strategically plan for growth – as processors/producers develop new products and expand into new markets, it is important to consider how that growth will impact current and future operations. For example, as new product lines are developed, shipping infrastructure, etc. may need to be modified or modernized to ensure that needs can be met effectively.

Know your market – The events that were attended within the scope of this project were varied with respect to target audiences. When targeting specific consumers, highlighting the story and history behind the product generated a stronger connection. When targeting higher-level buyers, such as wholesalers, distributors, etc. product specifics, pricing strategies and other more finite information was necessary. In both cases, the potential customer is busy and is inundated with information, so it is important to highlight the product in memorable ways.



Future of Northeast Bites

NOFIA will continue to work with producers and processors and build upon the Northeast Bite Initiative. A part-time staff person has been hired to coordinate, and the Northeast Bites concept will be featured again at North on Tap and Foire Gourmande. Further, NOFIA will look at ways to expand the concept and ways to have this concept adopted in a broader sense.

