

Chambers of commerce tour Essex County farms



MIRIAM KATAWAZI, WINDSOR STAR

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Green beans are seen in the foreground as Kathryn Sullivan, Ontario Chamber of Commerce Policy Analyst , Matt Marchand, president of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, and John Landschoot, Plant Operations Manager at Bonduelle Foods- Tecumseh take a tour of the Bonduelle Foods plant in Tecumseh, Ont. July 26, 2016.

JASON KRYK / WINDSOR STAR

To strengthen an upcoming report on how to

improve the business climate for the agricultural sector, the Windsor-Essex and Ontario chambers of commerce toured Essex County on Tuesday.

“The report is focusing on agricultural and how we can double agricultural exports by 2020,” said Matt Marchand, president at the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. “Part of this exercise was to visit key areas, walk through them, ask questions and develop recommendations in advance of the report.”

Along with Kathryn Sullivan, a policy analyst with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Marchand visited five county businesses. The tour included meetings with wineries, food processors and agriculture stakeholders in order to gather information for the joint report to be released in late August.

Marchand said the Essex County tour was crucial because it is the leading agricultural county in the province.

In order to meet Premier Kathleen Wynne’s target of doubling exports from its agriculture sector by 2020, Marchand said the issues preventing growth need to be tackled.

Many of the businesses had the same complaints, he said. They cited struggles with the cost of electricity, the availability of natural gas and the regulatory burdens imposed on them by overlapping government jurisdictions.

“Major investors are making decisions to expand their enterprises, but whether to expand in Essex County or in Ohio or in other jurisdictions is an open question,” he said. “Part of the reason it’s an open question is due to the rising cost structure here in Ontario — particularly the cost of electricity. We heard it over and over again today on many different levels.”

With the sector employing one in 10 Ontarians and contributing to nearly six per cent of the provincial GDP, Sullivan stressed the importance of eliminating barriers to growth.

“Government policies haven’t necessarily aligned with what we need to see happen to ensure that business continues to grow in Ontario,” she said.

As one of the authors of the joint report, Sullivan said it will analyze and identify the most problematic factors negatively affecting the climate in

Ontario for agri-food businesses.

“The fact that regulatory burdens and the cost of electricity and the inadequate access to natural gas are affecting multiple industries is something obviously of concern for us as a chamber of commerce and it’s something we will address in the report,” she said.

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