



March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Provincial Planning Policy Branch  
777 Bay Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON  
M5G 2E5

**RE: ERO Registry #019-3136 Consultation on Growing the Size of the Greenbelt**

Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to protect and preserve Ontario farmlands and associated agricultural, natural, and cultural features of the countryside. We protect farmland in order to ensure a safe and sustainable food supply for future generations of Ontarians. OFT achieves this through direct land securement, stewardship, policy research, and education.

**OFT was pleased to hear about your desire to expand the Greenbelt to protect more of Ontario's farmlands and natural habitats.**

Ontario's farmland is a finite and non-renewable resource, and it is the foundation of one of the province's largest economic sectors, the agri-food sector. The agri-food sector annually contributes over \$47 billion to the GDP and employs more than 837,000 Ontarians along the supply chain<sup>1</sup>. Despite being an integral part of the provincial economy, farmland continues to be lost at an alarming rate due to non-agricultural development occurring on farmland. This development negatively impacts the long-term viability of the agri-food sector, and jeopardizes the contiguity of the provincial Agricultural System.

Recently, through changes to provincial plans such as the *Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)*, the Province has demonstrated their dedication to Ontario's agricultural sector by expanding the emphasis on the Agricultural System, which OFT would like to commend. The Agricultural System helps to promote a contiguous agricultural land base which prevents land fragmentation and protects Ontario's finite supply of farmland. OFT recognizes the Province's ongoing commitment to Ontario's agricultural sector, and appreciates the efforts that have been made to protect farmland through such changes.

The Greenbelt was created to enhance the protections for farmland and natural resources outlined in provincial land use planning policies in an area of the province that was facing extremely high development pressures. Development pressures have continued to grow across the province, and farmland and natural resources outside of the current Greenbelt area are being lost at an alarming rate. Expanding the Greenbelt will provide additional protections for farmland and natural resources in areas where it is most at-risk, and help enhance the long-term viability of Ontario's agricultural sector.

**OFT believes that the expansion of the Greenbelt will complement the newly expanded emphasis on the Agricultural System, and will help protect the long-term viability of the provincial agri-food sector.**



Moving forward, OFT would like to make some recommendations for the expansion of the Greenbelt that would be beneficial to Ontario's farmlands and agricultural sector. OFT recommends:

1. **That the Agricultural System that has been identified and mapped in the GGH be included in the expansion of the Greenbelt in its entirety.** The Agricultural System that has been mapped in the GGH contains some of the most at-risk farmland in the province, which would benefit from the additional protections of the Greenbelt. As recognized in the Agricultural Systems planning approach, farmlands must maintain a critical mass and a level of connectivity to maintain their economic viability as agricultural lands. If the Greenbelt is not expanded using this strategy, development will create isolated pockets of farmland on which farming will not be economically viable. The expansion must not create developmental patterns that will lead to farmland loss.
2. **That farmers and farmland owners are consulted during the expansion of the Greenbelt.** As direct stakeholders, input should be gathered from both farmers and farmland owners in Ontario. Consulting these groups will result in an effective and realistic strategy to expand the Greenbelt that will aid in the continuation of agriculture in the future.

**OFT would also like to point out that this expansion provides an opportunity for Ontario to become a leader in farmland conservation in Canada.** Ontario has some of the best agricultural land in Canada, much of which is not protected by current land-use planning policies. In comparison, other provinces like British Columbia have established themselves as leaders in farmland conservation by protecting over 11 million acres of land suitable for agriculture<sup>2</sup>. This is significantly more farmland than what is protected by the current Greenbelt<sup>3</sup>. By significantly expanding the Greenbelt boundaries to include more of Ontario's agricultural land, the Province can make a bold commitment to Ontario's farmland and the future of Ontario's agricultural sector.

Additionally, by protecting Ontario's agricultural land for agriculture it is being made more accessible for future generations of farmers. Ontario is currently facing a farmland succession crisis wherein young farmers seeking to enter the industry are not able to access land because they are not able to afford the prices competing developers and land speculators are able to pay. **Protecting farmland for agriculture will ensure that the land remains accessible for Ontario's farmers now and in the future.**

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for the expansion of the Greenbelt. We invite discussion and welcome any questions you might have. We look forward to continuing to work with the Province to strengthen the Agricultural System and to protect the long-term viability of Ontario's agricultural sector.

Most Sincerely,

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References:

[1] Ontario Federation of Agriculture. 2020. Agriculture Matters – A Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff. <https://ofa.on.ca/resources/guide-for-municipal-councillors-and-staff/>

[2] Government of British Columbia. 2021. Agricultural Land Reserve. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/agricultural-land-and-environment/agricultural-land-reserve/the-agricultural-land-reserve>

[3] The Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. (2019). The Greenbelt. [https://www.greenbelt.ca/about\\_the\\_greenbelt](https://www.greenbelt.ca/about_the_greenbelt)