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Funding to provincial farmland conservation organization to support specialized course on rural land use planning

Students to present at upcoming Forum event in Centre Wellington

Guelph, ON –

The Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) and the University of Guelph's Rural Planning and Development (RPD) master's program have partnered to develop a specialized course in farmland protection. OFT has received financial support from the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) Alumni Foundation to support their contribution to the development and delivery of the course.

The course was formed through significant discussions between OFT Executive Director Martin Straathof, and Dr. Sara Epp, faculty member in the RPD program.

The course offers RPD graduate students an in-depth look at the value of Ontario farmland, and methods for the permanent protection of agricultural land and food systems. The course will conclude with a final project focusing on the practical development of local farmland preserves and a toolkit to support municipal planning departments.

"The pursuit of local agricultural preserves will require collaboration between farmers, municipalities, agricultural organizations, land trusts, grassroots organizations, and community members across Ontario," says Straathof, and emphasized that the time to act is now.

Straathof notes, "Rural and urban needs can be balanced, which creates the ideal long-term plan for communities to access healthy, local food. But farmland is under significant threat of sprawling development. Students of this course will come away with an understanding of the complexities of protecting farmland and why it is vital for Ontario's future."

An additional benefit of this course is that the students' final project will provide practical agri-food planning resources for the long-term protection of farmland.

"OFT's initiative to develop and collaboratively deliver this course aligns seamlessly with the RPD program's commitment to practical and experiential learning, while addressing the urgent need for farmland preservation in Ontario." explains Dr. Epp. "Its innovative approach to integrating agricultural land preservation into our curriculum presents a unique and vital learning opportunity for our students."

Students from the course will be attending OFT's annual Farmland Forum event, on March 21, 2024 in Elora, Ontario, to present their final project. The Farmland Forum provides a platform for discussing topics on the intersection of farmland preservation, community planning, food security, and Ontario's agri-food sector to a mixed audience of planners, policy makers, farmers, researchers and conservationists. Tickets are still available by visiting www.ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/forum/.



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About the Ontario Farmland Trust

The Ontario Farmland Trust is a non-profit, charitable organization that works across Ontario to protect farmlands and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features of the countryside for the benefit of current and future generations. Since 2004, OFT has been facilitating Farmland Conservation Easement Agreements with land owners, currently holding 22 agreements across Ontario. OFT is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2024, and aims to increase the number of agreements exponentially over the next five years. Donations are necessary to fund this work, and are gratefully accepted at www.ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/donate. Businesses wishing to make an impact to protect farmland are encouraged to inquire with OFT about ways to partner.

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For more information contact:

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