

Farmers and Rural Leaders Generate New Policy Ideas at Annual Farmland Preservation Forum

March 1, 2012

Guelph – New development taxes, Green Energy Act reform, agricultural conservation easement programs and improved provincial land use policies have been highlighted by farmers, planners and municipal leaders as priorities for sustaining agriculture and improving farmland protection in Ontario.

150 people attended the Ontario Farmland Trust's 2012 Farmland Preservation Forum at the University of Guelph on February 17th, representing nearly every agricultural region in southern Ontario. The theme "Balancing Agriculture and Resource Demands in Rural Ontario" generated much discussion and allowed new policy ideas to come forward.

"The intent of this year's event was to bring focus to the relationship between policy, land use and rural economic development across Ontario," says Matt Setzkorn, Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) Policy Coordinator and forum organizer. "Do existing policies lead us toward balancing the multiple functions of the rural landscape, or toward land use conflict?"

Setzkorn says land use conflict is of particular concern to primary agriculture, which relies on a stable landbase, established farm infrastructure and a network of supporting farm businesses. Forum speakers and participants expressed concerns about support for agriculture and farmland protection among intensifying competition with green energy developments, aggregate pits and quarries, natural heritage preservation and urban sprawl.

"The public has the false impression that land use is stable and sustainable in rural Ontario," says Clarington planner Faye Langmaid, who spoke as part of a panel at the event. "The reality is that the rural landscape is continually evolving."

"Let us challenge ourselves to shape policy that creates cooperation rather than conflict," adds Carl Cosack, farmer and Chair of the North Dufferin Agriculture and Community Taskforce, a group opposing the mega-quarry application near Shelburne. Cosack suggests new policies that are socially sustainable and include community engagement. One example is allowing communities that host resources like aggregate and wind to bid on becoming the home for these developments rather than the Province favouring outside interests.

Leadership, education and collaboration were clear themes that emerged at the forum. Patrick Robson, Niagara Region Planning Commissioner encouraged forum participants to be responsive to the needs in their communities and actively inform policy development. "Take the initiative to engage the Province, explain where land use and agricultural policy is lagging and suggest improvements based on innovation in your community."

Bill Hodgson, Mayor of Lincoln, reminded the crowd that "While application and interpretation of policy is primarily top-down, policy development happens from the bottom-up." Niagara Region was profiled as a case study in agricultural policy development.

MEDIA RELEASE: News/Agriculture/Environment Editors and Reporters

During small group discussions, new policy directions were suggested, including:

- Creating a new tax on any 'change of land use' or 'greenfield' development to support farmland protection and more efficient land use;
- Providing greater protections for agriculture and farmland from aggregate developments within the Provincial Policy Statement;
- Reforming the process for resolving land use disputes (eg. community referendums in addition to Ontario Municipal Board hearings);
- Introducing farmland conservation easement programs that support farmers and protect farmland;
- Improving the green energy development approval process to fully engage the communities impacted.

At the end of the day, forum participants indicated a strong desire to align with common policy and planning goals for agriculture, understanding that policy should:

- Prioritize the protection of farmland as a finite and valuable resource;
- Enhance farm profitability for all sizes, types and intensities of production;
- Prevent land use conflicts;
- Preserve the ability to be self-sufficient in food production; and
- Seek to achieve long-term social, environmental and economic sustainability, acknowledging that the countryside and rural-agricultural communities provide the foundation for Ontario's prosperity.

Stew Hilts, OFT Chair, says "Today's dialogue, bringing farmers, policy-makers and others together, is critical to enabling innovation in policy and discovering new opportunities for collaboration and engagement that are essential to building a sustainable future for Ontario agriculture."

Full forum proceedings can be viewed at www.OntarioFarmlandTrust.ca.

-30-

For more information contact:

Matt Setzkorn, Policy Coordinator & Forum Organizer
Ontario Farmland Trust
(519) 824-4120 ext. 52654
matt@ontariofarmlandtrust.ca
www.OntarioFarmlandTrust.ca



Ontario Farmland Trust – Protecting Farmland for Farmers

Through research, education and direct land securement, the Ontario Farmland Trust works to protect and preserve farmlands and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features of the countryside to improve the quality of life for current and future generations.

Founded in 2004, the Ontario Farmland Trust is a registered not-for-profit organization whose vision is for an Ontario that includes a healthy and vibrant agricultural landscape that provides a safe and local supply of food for all Ontarians now and in the future.