The Future of Farming and Farmland Protection in Ontario

2017 Ontario Farmland Forum

March 30, 2017, Mariposa Inn & Conference Centre, Orillia

About the Forum

This year’s farmland forum discussed the current context of Ontario farmland and explored the possibilities of how this valuable resource could be better protected in the future. This is a timely topic, considering Ontario continues to lose farms to urban sprawl, aggregate extraction, and other types of non-agricultural development in nearly every community across the Province.

The Ontario Farmland Trust hosts the annual Farmland Forum as a place to bring together government, non-government, and community stakeholders to network, share, and learn about emerging policy innovations and practical approaches that advance the permanent protection of farmland. In total, 129 planners, farmers, researchers, policy makers, elected officials, and land conservation enthusiasts from all across Ontario attended the 2017 Forum.

Forum topics included: Indigenous perspectives on farmland preservation, shifting farmland ownership in Ontario, measuring farmland conversion in Ontario, Ontario farmland protection in the national context, significance of soil classification in land use planning, and an exploration of Oregon’s experience in farmland protection.

These topics are relevant in Ontario today, given that the Province is updating policies and plans that control farmland protection in Ontario, including the Greenbelt and Growth Plans. Dialogue at the Forum helps to raise community concerns and new ideas that inform the future of provincial and community farmland preservation policies, programs, and projects.

Summaries of forum presentations and dialogue are highlighted in these proceedings.
Thank you to our 2017 Forum Supporters

Forum Program and Presentations

PowerPoint presentations from the Forum can be viewed on the Ontario Farmland Trust website.

Welcome & Opening Remarks
- Kathryn Enders, Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust
- Margaret Prophet, Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition
- Steve Clarke, Mayor of Orillia
- Jeff Monague, Beausoleil First Nation

Keynote: An Indigenous Perspective on Farming and Farmland Preservation
- Dan Longboat, Director of the Indigenous Environmental Studies and Science Program, Trent University
Forum Program and Presentations (continued)

Panel: Shifting Farmland Ownership & What it Means for the Future of Farming in Ontario & Canada

Farmland Ownership, Farmland Rental Markets, and the Adoption of Conservation Practices
Brady Deaton, Food, Agriculture & Resource Economics, University of Guelph

Concerns from the Field: The Impact of Land Ownership Leaving the Hands of Farmers
Emery Huszka, National Farmers Union

Farmland Lease Financing: Helping Farmers Meet their Goals
Lisa Courtney Lloyd, VP Marketing, Bonnefield

Facilitator: Norm Ragetlie, Chair, Ontario Farmland Trust

Plenary: Measuring Farmland Conversion in Ontario: Quantifying Farmland Loss through Official Plan Amendments
Wayne Caldwell, Sara Epp, & James Newlands, University of Guelph

Concurrent Session: The Impact of Farmland Preservation Policy in Ontario & Across Canada
A Look at Protecting Farmland in Ontario from a National Perspective
David Connell, University of Northern British Columbia

Concurrent Session: The Significance of Soil Classification in Land Use Planning
Soil Classification Project and What it Means for Ontario Agriculture
Daniel Saurette, Land Resource Specialist, OMAFRA
Arthur Churchyard, Policy Advisor, OMAFRA

The Expansion of Farming in the North and the Need for Updated Soil Classification Maps
Peggy Brekveld, Vice President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Plenary: Holding the Line & Preserving Farmland: Oregon’s Experience with Firm Urban Boundaries & Long-term Viability Analysis for Agriculture
Jim Johnson, Oregon Department of Agriculture

Wrap Up & Concluding Remarks
Norm Ragetlie, Chair, Ontario Farmland Trust
Kathryn Enders, Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust

Master of Ceremonies
Kathryn Enders, Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust
Keynote Summary:

An Indigenous Perspective on Farming and Farmland Preservation

Dan Longboat, Director of the Indigenous Environmental Studies and Science Program, Trent University

The keynote session focused on discussing a brief history of Indigenous relationships with farming, food, and interactions with settlers, and also explored current perspectives of the role and importance of agriculture to Indigenous communities.

Dan Longboat provided commentary on a variety of key areas regarding an Indigenous perspective of farming and farmland protection. His key ideas are as follows:

**Indigenous Peoples**
- Indigenous peoples that live close to the landscape have maintained and created knowledge systems that have emerged through this everlasting relationship
- These knowledge systems have been used by Indigenous peoples to benefit the continuation of life since time immemorial
These knowledge systems focus on acknowledgement and giving thanks for all the interconnected elements in the world that support life.

Indigenous peoples face struggles of maintaining their way of life, sovereignty, autonomy, and freedom.

**Treaty Making, Settlement and the Reserve System**
- Impacted the First Nations ability to access land and food.
- The deforestation and settlement pattern of ‘farming’ changed the ecology of the land and reduced the habitat for the maintenance of the First Nation traditional foods and regional biodiversity.

**Regional Development**
- Regional development and land settlement led to the transition of land to private property which changed the landscape that First Nations peoples depending on for access to food.

**The Farm and Beyond**
- Farming is currently focused on the production of crop foods (i.e. grains, market gardens) which is limited thinking in terms of the entire food system.
- There is a whole body of knowledge around the gathering of foods, hunting, and fishing and the concept of the farm must encapsulate these as an integral part of agriculture.
- Beyond the farm we must think about endangered foodscapes where we are endangering people’s well-being through the destruction of farmland and use of harmful chemicals.

**Restoration and Revitalization**
- We have to think about farms as larger than just the field and garden but also make connections to larger landscapes of trees, woodlands, and hillsides.
- Sovereignty Pillars – There are different pillars of food sovereignty that support local food control and production: (1) local control, (2) valuing food providers, (3) working with nature, (4) building knowledge and skills, (5) creating food for people, (6) producing good food, and (7) recognizing food and food production as sacred.

**Panel Summary:**

**Shifting Farmland Ownership & What it Means for the Future of Farming in Ontario & Canada**

This panel explored how the ownership of Ontario’s farmland has changed over time and the current challenges and opportunities faced by agricultural landowners when deciding the future of their farmland. This panel contained many different perspectives on farmland ownership.
including representatives from academia, farm organizations, and private investment companies. This was an interactive panel that fielded many questions from the audience. The panel was facilitated by Norm Ragetlie, Chair of the Ontario Farmland Trust. The panel included the following participants:

**BRADY DEATON**  
*Food, Agriculture & Resource Economics, University of Guelph*

**EMERY HUSZKA**  
*National Farmers Union*

**LISA COURTNEY LLOYD**  
*VP Marketing, Bonnefield*

Each panel member was allotted time to provide input on the how farmland ownership has been shifting in Ontario now and into the future. Highlights are outlined below:

### Farmland Ownership, Farmland Rental Markets, and the Adoption of Conservation Practices

- Young farmers’ access to farmland is driving the majority of questions and concerns about farmland ownership i.e. increased value of land, buildings, and rental rates makes it difficult to access farmland
- Most of the individuals that own farmland are non-farmers that rent out their land to farmers i.e. only 10% of farmers identified landowners as being farmers
- More data is needed to understand foreign farmland ownership in Ontario
- There is little difference between what farmers do with owned vs. rented land in terms of tillage but farmers are more likely to use cover crops when they own the land
Concerns from the Field: The Impact of Land Ownership Leaving the Hands of Farmers

- Discussion about the importance of food sovereignty in Ontario
- If farming is to be sustainable in Ontario it has to be economically sustainable for farm families, environmentally sustainable, and socially sustainable
- Factors that influence farmers to sell to non-farmers are the potential to increase income and policies that encourage this action
- Discussed the struggles of young farmers accessing land due to high land values and lack of equity and financing
- Food is a unique business that is essential and policy and education systems must improve the way they protect and discuss it

Farmland Lease Financing: Helping Farmers Meet their Goals

- Bonnefield’s goal is to keep Canadian farmland in farming and the company does not consider itself to be an investor, but rather a partner with farmers
- Example of a farm family in NB who wanted to add additional land to their farm for their children and could not afford it, so they partnered with Bonnefield to purchase the land and rent it back to them
- Also works with non-profit organizations to buy farmland and ensure it stays in agricultural production
- Bonnefield understands its investments are long term and creates long term leases that reflect this

Plenary Summary:

Measuring Farmland Conversion in Ontario: Quantifying Farmland Loss through Official Plan Amendments

Wayne Caldwell, Sara Epp, & James Newlands, University of Guelph

This session focused on the lack of data that accurately documents changes to farmland availability over time. This knowledge gap is troubling since farmland is an integral part of Ontario and is suffering from rapid loss to urban and other non-agricultural uses. Therefore, quantifying this loss is important so that better policy decisions can be made for farmland protection in the future.
The presenters provided information on their new method for quantifying farmland loss through Official Plan Amendments. The key ideas of this presentation are outlined below:

**Why Use Official Plan Amendments to Measure Farmland Loss?**
- There is no current accurate measure of farmland loss and other tools like the censuses, aerial imagery, and municipal performance measurement systems do not show a timely or necessarily full picture of land use transitions of farmland
- Official Plan Amendments show when the decision to allow land use transition of farmland to other land uses occurs

**Insights into Research Results**
- Found that regions under extreme growth pressures had redesignated more farmland for development including York, Halton, and Peel Regions
- The Greenbelt Plan resulted in 0 ha of land loss within the plan area, however land outside of the plan area suffered increased losses
- Examined the population density per hectare of land that was redesignated from farmland and it was found that Brant County had the highest density and Niagara Region having the lowest
Research Challenges

- Regional variation of site specific planning policies, aggregate results and development delays
- The inconsistent definition of farmland i.e. some Official Plans have one designation for farmland, others have many so they are difficult to compare

Concurrent Session Summary:

A Look at Protecting Farmland in Ontario from a National Perspective  
David Connell, University of Northern British Columbia

This session focused on discussing Ontario’s farmland protection policies and how they compare to other Provinces across Canada. It calls for a greater priority on policy and non-legislative frameworks to protect farmland to stem the rapid loss of the country’s agricultural land base that is currently on-going. This session discussed the work of a national research project in Canada that examined agricultural land use planning across the country.

The key points of this session are as follows:

Exploring the Need for a National Agri-Food Policy

- There is currently no national agri-food policy which has resulted in a patchwork effort that governs food governance and the agricultural land base
• There is limited to no protection for farmland and this problem has not been highlighted by the federal government or political parties in general regardless of the fact it is mentioned clearly by Farmers unions that have clearly defined the issue and provided potential solutions.

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Canada – Framework Research
• Research evaluated the strength of legislative frameworks across Canada to protect farmland using a variety of factors including efficiency, efficacy, and effectiveness.
• Legislative frameworks are policies, acts, regulations, statutory plans, and bylaws that can encompass multiple jurisdictions.
• This work developed the four principles of land use planning for protecting farmland which are: (1) maximize stability, (2) integrate public priorities across jurisdictions, (3) minimize uncertainty, and (4) accommodate flexibility.

Final Recommendation of this Research
• This research advocates for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to make a clear statement of policy to protect Canada’s farmland to as a national interest.

Concurrent Session Summary:

The Significance of Soil Classification in Land Use Planning

This concurrent session provided insight on current soil classification projects being conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and explored how soil is influencing the expansion of farming in Northern Ontario. These are pertinent discussions as the classification of soil in Southern Ontario will impact land use planning within the Province. In Ontario’s North, the farming ‘boom’ that is currently on-going has been fueled by the prominence of good agricultural soil within the region. This session included the following participants:

DANIEL SAURETTE  
Land Resource Specialist, OMAFRA

ARTHUR CHURCHYARD  
Policy Advisor, OMAFRA

PEGGY BREKVELD  
Vice President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Key topics from OMAFRA’S presentation on the ‘Soil Classification Project and What it Means for Ontario Agriculture’ included:

The Current Pressures on Ontario’s Soil Health
- Soil health is vulnerable to a wide variety of threats such as the loss of organic matter, urbanization, water erosion, wind erosion, climate change and compaction

The Soil Health & Conservation Strategy
- Healthy soil is an integral part of life
- This strategy aims to work collaboratively with farmers, industry and community partners, as well as First Nations groups to establish a strategy that promotes the stewardship of soil and maintenance of soil health in the long run
- A number of components make soil health conservation possible including (1) Soil Management, (2) Soil Information Mapping, (3) Soil Monitoring and Modelling, (4) Soil Knowledge and Innovation

Soil Mapping and Conservation Project
- Current soil maps are being renewed for a number of reasons including land use pressures, evidence-based decision making and new methods for mapping (i.e. LiDAR, GIS)
- This project began in 2016 and will end in 2018
- Data that will be used to complete this project includes: LiDAR, Canada Land Inventory (CLI) factors like climate, soil profiles and characteristics, geology (i.e. stoniness)
How does Soil Information Inform Land Use Planning?

- Soil has a significant role in planning as we need to consider prime agricultural land, CLI classes and landscape fragmentation
- Prime Agricultural Land – the PPS defines this as CLI 1-3 recognizing that this is the best quality soil in Ontario
- Prime Agricultural Area – areas where prime agricultural land predominates and includes CLI 4-7 and concentrated areas of farms with characteristics of on-going agriculture
- OMAFRA would like to identify prime agricultural areas including prime agricultural land and also important areas with higher CLIs
- Updated soil information will be used by the Province and municipalities as they review their Official Plans to determine areas most suitable for agricultural protection
- Ontario is investing in improved soils information to better protect the agriculture land base and support agri-food economic development

Key topics from Peggy Brekveld’s presentation on the Expansion of Farming in the North and the Need to Update Soil Classification Maps included:
What is the Difference between Agriculture in the North and South of the Province?

- There is bias in southern Ontario in regards to what is actually considered the north and many stereotypes regarding northern characteristics are prevalent
- Northern and Southern Ontario are quite comparable
- Farmland in both areas is under development pressures and farmland needs to be protected across Ontario
- In Northern Ontario farmland protection is not the area of focus as it is Southern Ontario, but this will change with increased interest in northern agriculture
- Cities begin on arable land bringing out farmland protection concerns and this is true in Northern Ontario
- Programs are beginning in Northern Ontario to support farmland protection like the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC)

What is agriculture?

- Agriculture is bigger than just farming and includes agri-business and processing
- This is why agricultural asset mapping is key to planning
- Research is critical as scientific research will lead us to the best answers for our changing climate, soil health, water and land resources.
- Research organizations do exist and they need to be supported and their information needs to be shared (i.e. Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA), Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN), and Thunder Bay Agricultural Research Station (TBARS))

Plenary Summary:

Holding the Line & Preserving Farmland: Oregon’s Experience with Firm Urban Growth Boundaries & Long-Term Viability Analysis for Agriculture

Jim Johnson, Oregon Department of Agriculture
This plenary focused on Oregon’s experience preserving its agricultural land base through a number of planning techniques including implementing firm urban boundaries and examining the long-term viability of agriculture within the State. Due to their context similarities, Oregon’s example provides an interesting case study for possible policy routes for Ontario to better protect farmland.

The key messages of this session are as follows:

How does Oregon Protect Farmland?
- Although this presentation focused on urban growth boundaries, Oregon has a whole toolbox that it implements to protect the state’s agricultural land base
- The toolbox includes: exclusive farm use zoning, urban growth boundaries, scale of rural development, extensions of utilities, right to farm, special tax assessment, and easements

Insights in Oregon’s Urban Growth Boundaries
- All cities in Oregon must establish urban growth boundaries and plan for a 20 year supply of residential, commercial, and industrial lands which must be supported by data
- If the municipalities are successful at establishing the need for additional land Oregon has a priority scheme to direct this growth i.e. lands established for an urban reserve are the first to be used
- The statewide population forecasting system has eliminated some of the challenges associated with implementing firm urban boundaries
- Urban Reserves: land that can be developed at urban densities that make efficient use of existing and future public and private infrastructure investments
- Rural Reserves: these lands are suitable for long-term agricultural or forestry operations and take a variety of factors into account

How did Oregon Measure Long Term Agricultural Viability
- Oregon studied sub-regions, capability factors, and suitability factors to determine agricultural viability
- Capability factors: this includes factors like soil (i.e. agricultural capability classes), water (i.e. availability for irrigation)
- Suitability factors: these factors focused on maintaining large blocks of the agricultural land base to maintain their working integrity (factors included: adjacent land uses, parcelization, agricultural infrastructure, farm clusters, and agricultural zoning)
- This work allowed the state to identify differences in agricultural production across the state and led to the development of an agricultural lands hierarchy
- The Agricultural Land Hierarchy is as follows: (1) foundational agricultural lands, (2) important agricultural lands, and (3) conflicted agricultural lands
- These factors were then used to establish urban and rural reserves
Closing Remarks:

The 13th annual Ontario Farmland Forum: The Future of Farming and Farmland Protection in Ontario was a great success! This event gave attendees the opportunity to learn about Ontario’s current farming and farmland protection context. It also provided a wide variety of research, case studies, and tools that can be used to further strengthen the province’s current farmland protection practices.

The Forum’s keynote speakers provided thought-provoking perspectives and case studies of farming and farmland protection that are closely tied to the work of attendees. In an evaluation form, almost 90% of attendees agreed that the Forum was relevant to their work. Dan Longboat discussed an Indigenous perspective of farming, relationships to the land and agricultural land protection beyond the field. Jim Johnson discussed how Oregon has preserved its farmland through urban growth boundaries and by assessing long-term agricultural viability.

The Farmland Forum was an excellent opportunity to provide further education on the importance of protecting farmland for present and future generations. It is critical for environmental and economic sustainability and it shows that we must continue to work towards building a balanced and sustainable future.
## List of Forum Participants:

### Non-Government Representation
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture
- Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
- Ontario Land Trust Alliance
- Sustain Ontario
- Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance
- Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario
- Farms at Work
- Holland Marsh Growers’ Association
- Environmental Defence
- Rare Charitable Research Reserve
- Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust

### Municipal Government Representation
- City of Ottawa
- City of Hamilton
- County of Bruce
- County of Huron
- County of Prince Edward
- City of Kawartha Lakes
- County of Simcoe
- Municipality of Durham
- Municipality of Grey Highlands
- Municipality of South Bruce
- Region of Halton
- Region of Niagara
- Region of Peel
- Region of York
- Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury
- Town of Georgina
- Town of Milton
- Town of Mono
- Town of New Tecumseth
- Town of Penetanguishene
- Township of Alnwick Hadimand
- Township of Amaranth
- Township of Clearview
- Township of Douro-Drummer
- Township of Otonabee-South Monaghan
- Township of Springwater
- Township of Tarbutt
- The Village of Burk’s Falls
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

### Provincial Government Representation
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

### Industry Representatives
- Planscape
- Cole Engineering Group Limited

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