This year’s farmland forum discussed the current context of farmland viability in Ontario and explored strategies and tools that are available to promote and support farmland now and into the future. This is particularly timely as discussions of farmland protection are increasingly incorporating the economic viability of agriculture in a general move towards a systems approach and acknowledging the many challenges facing the agricultural sector.

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, 103 planners, farmers, researchers, policy makers, elected officials, and land conservation enthusiasts from all across Ontario attended the 2018 Forum.

Forum topics included: British Columbia’s experience protecting farmland via the Agricultural Land Reserve and Commission, strategies and tools to support agricultural viability at the regional and county levels, both new and old Provincial policies that support and promote thriving agri-food systems, success stories from local agricultural entrepreneurs and diversified farmers, and reflections on the state of viable farmland in the past, present, and looking to the future.

These topics were timely and relevant, as the agricultural sector looks towards the future and considers the challenges and opportunities to maintaining and building on Ontario’s experience protecting and promoting farmland viability. Dialogue at the Forum helps highlight these challenges and opportunities from multiple perspectives and build on 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 2018 Forum Partners and 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
Bill Roberts, Chair, Community Economic Development Commission
Janice Maynard, Councillor, Prince Edward County
Todd Smith, MPP, Prince Edward-Hastings

Keynote: British Columbia’s Experience in Farmland Protection and Viability: Perspectives and Experiences from the Agricultural Land Commission
Kim Grout, RPP, CEO, Agricultural Land Commission

Panel: Planning Strategies and Tools to Preserve and Support Agricultural Viability
LEAR – A Method for Determining Prime Agricultural Designations in Prince Edward County
Paul Walsh, RPP, Manager of Planning, Prince Edward County
Harvesting the Benefits of Agricultural Advisory Committees: Perspectives from Halton Region
Anna Demarchi-Meyers, Agricultural Liaison Officer, Halton Region
Community Improvement Plans: Aligning Fiscal Tools, Land Use Regulations, and Processes to Support Rural Businesses and Tourism in Haldimand County
Craig Manley, RPP, General Manager Planning & Economic Development, Haldimand County
Facilitator: Margaret Walton, RPP, Board Member, Ontario Farmland Trust

Plenary: Provincial Policy Perspectives: How the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs is Promoting Integration of Farmland Protection and Viability
Helma Geerts, RPP, Policy Advisor, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs

Panel: Success Stories from the Field – How has Planning Positively Influenced These Prince Edward County Agricultural Businesses?
Caroline Granger, Owner and Winemaker, Grange of Prince Edward Estate Vineyard & Winery
Colin Campbell, Owner, The Campbell’s Orchards
Facilitator: Hon. Lyle Vanclief, Former Minister of Agriculture

Plenary: Viable Farmland: Ontario’s Past, Present, and Future
Sara Epp, PhD Candidate & Sessional Lecturer, University of Guelph

Wrap Up & Concluding Remarks
Bernard Pope, Chair, Ontario Farmland Trust
Kathryn Enders, Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust

Master of Ceremonies
Kathryn Enders, Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust
The keynote session provided insights on farmland viability from British Columbia’s Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The ALR is a provincially legislated area designated to protect and promote agricultural activities on the Province’s limited arable land.

Kim discussed the Agricultural Land Commission’s experience protecting agricultural land and preserving its viability. Key themes and ideas are as follows:

**What is the Agricultural Land Reserve?**

- Covering roughly 4.7 million hectares, the ALR is a provincial land use zone that prioritizes agriculture and works to protect farmland, encourage farming, and regulate non-agricultural uses on arable land.
- The ALR was largely designated between 1974 and 1976 following the Land Commission Act in response to urban growth pressures and public concerns about preserving farmland.
- It includes all Canadian Land Inventory (CLI) class 1-4 lands as well as classes 5-7 when needed to promote a contiguous agricultural land base or prevent intrusion into the ALR.
The Agricultural Land Commission (ALC)

- The ALC is an independent administrative tribunal responsible for interpreting and applying legislation about the ALR
- Their primary purposes and functions include: preserving farmland, encouraging farming, working with local governments and First Nations to ensure the compliance and enforcement of ALR legislation, adjudicate land use change applications within the ALR, and reviewing municipal plans and bylaws for consistency with ALR legislation

Land Use in the ALR

- A wide range of farm uses are permitted within the ALR to support and promote farm viability and include farm retail, agritourism, and storage uses. Local government may regulate some uses to ensure farmland protection but cannot prohibit normal farm practices
- Permitted non-farm uses (e.g. B&Bs, pet breeding) can be prohibited or regulated by local governments but are subject to threshold and restrictions as per ALR policies
- Land subdivision and non-agricultural uses (e.g. those that exceed thresholds or are outright prohibited) require approval from local government and the ALC before commencing

Applications

- Land users have to submit applications and require approval to introduce non-agricultural uses (e.g. non-farm commercial), subdivide land, or include/exclude land in the ALR
- 80% of applications are regarding subdivisions and non-agricultural uses and very few applications result in ALR boundary changes

The Role of Local Government

- Municipalities and local government are essential partners in the success of the ALR
- They are the first step in the application process and are able to either deny the application outright or forward approved applications onto the ALC with comments and recommendations
- They are also the forefront of ensuring compliance and enforcement with local policies and bylaws that are consistent with ALR legislation

Ongoing Challenges

- Population and urban growth pressures and the need to strengthen urban boundaries
- Managing non-farm uses in the ALR, particularly those near urban centres
- Increasing costs of farmland, in part due to land use speculation
- Subdivision pressure, particularly related to farm succession planning
- Ensuring consistency between municipal plans, bylaws, and ALR legislation
Panel Summary

Planning Strategies and Tools to Preserve and Support Agricultural Viability

This panel provided insights from Prince Edward County, Haldimand County, and Halton Region about the different tools and strategies available and used to preserve and support agricultural viability. Tools and strategies included: mapping based approaches to land evaluation, leveraging agricultural advisory committees for program and policy development and delivery, and aligning rural development strategies with bylaws, programs, and industry objectives. The panel was facilitated by Ontario Farmland Trust board member, Margaret Walton. The panel included the following participants:

PAUL WALSH
RPP, Manager of Planning, Prince Edward County

ANNA DEMARCHI-MEYERS
Agricultural Liaison Officer, Halton Region

CRAIG MANLEY
RPP, General Manager Planning & Economic Development, Haldimand County
Each panel member provided a presentation and engaged in discussion about the strategies and tools used by their region or county, as summarized below:

**LEAR – A method for determining prime agricultural designation in Prince Edward County**
- Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) is an objective and systematic approach to evaluating lands to determine Prime Agricultural designation.
- Land evaluated by LEAR is provided a score based on: Canadian Land Inventory (CLI) soil classification, parcel size, current land use, and nearby conflicting land uses. Land with a score above 140 is considered Prime Agricultural Land and below 140 is Rural Land.
- The ultimate goal of LEAR is to identify and designate large, contiguous blocks of Prime Agricultural Land and demarcate these for protection.

**Harvesting the benefits of Agricultural Advisory Committees: Perspectives from Halton Region**
- The Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC) consists of a combination of farm organization representatives, regional staff and councillors, and members of the agricultural community. Their function is to advise and assist the region with developing and implementing agricultural policies and programs.
- They find that having Terms of Reference help to establish and secure a mandate, goals, purpose, operational details, etc. to allow for the smooth operating of the Committee.
- Developing an annual work plan that is realistic and sticking to this plan has been critical for prioritizing tasks and meeting the Committee’s objectives and goals.

**Community Improvement Plans: Aligning fiscal tools, land use regulations, and processes to support rural business and tourism in Haldimand County**
- Haldimand County’s rural development strategy incorporates agriculture, tourism, community improvements, and business development and is facilitated through the alignment of County objectives, structures, programs, and regulations.
- Through consultation with their Agricultural Advisory Committee and the agricultural community more broadly, municipal regulations and bylaws were altered to better align with the development strategy and to build tourism capacity and interest in value added agriculture while also protecting farmland and normal farm practices.
- Tools to build tourism capacity on farms included: grants for building restoration, fee rebates, and value added workshops.

**Plenary Summary**

**Provincial Policy Perspectives: How the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is Promoting Integration of Farmland Protection and Viability**

HELMA GEERTS, RPP, Policy Advisor, OMAFRA

This session discussed how provincial land use policies and guidelines support agriculture in Ontario. Helma reviewed five tools used by OMAFRA to promote farmland and farm-system
viability and protection, including the newly released Agricultural System approach for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and provincial Agricultural Impact Assessment requirements.

Tool One: Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Agricultural areas
- These guidelines apply to Prime Agricultural Areas across Ontario and aim to provide policy consistency across municipalities, promote agricultural entrepreneurialism, and protect farmland
- Permitted uses are broken into three categories: agricultural, agriculture-related, and on-farm diversified. While agricultural uses of all types, sizes, and intensities are promoted and protected, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses have some constraints and must be compatible with agriculture.

Tool Two: Agricultural System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- Applied to the GGH and the four Plans therein, this tool takes a broad approach to achieve greater continuity in protecting farmland viability
- The System combines two main elements, the agricultural land base and the agri-food network, which not only protects farmland but also acknowledges the importance of the supply chain in supporting agricultural viability. These elements are then visualized in a mapping portal that is adaptable to municipalities’ needs

Tool Three: Agricultural Impact Assessment Requirements
- These guidelines apply throughout Ontario and provide a common approach across municipalities for development planning and approvals for non-agricultural land use change in Prime Agricultural Areas
These assessments provide suggestions on how to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate impacts on agricultural land and the agri-food network, in that order of priority.

Tool Four: Farming and Food Production Protection Act (FFPPA)
- This act protects agricultural operations from restrictive municipal bylaws or complaints regarding normal, day-to-day farm practices that may produce odour, noise, flies, etc.

Tool Five: Minimum Distance Separation Guidelines
- These guidelines are strictly focused on distancing livestock facilities and manure storage from sensitive land to mitigate land use conflicts and odour complaints.

Panel Summary

Success Stories from the Field – How has Planning Positively Influenced These Prince Edward County Agricultural Businesses?

This session asked two farmers from Prince Edward County to share their success stories from the field. During the panel, they shared their businesses’ history and reflected on the many contributors to their challenges and successes, including business design, municipal planning, and government policies. This session highlighted the panelists’ ingenuity and love for farming and rural life while acknowledging some of the challenges and strategies for farms to remain viable in Ontario. The panel was facilitated by former Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Lyle Vanclief.

The session included the following panelists:

CAROLINE GRANGER
Grange of Prince Edward Estate Vineyard & Winery

COLIN CAMPBELL
The Campbell’s Orchards

Caroline is the owner and winemaker for the Grange of Prince Edward Vineyard & Winery. Key points from her presentation are summarized below:

- Caroline’s vineyard and winery has grown from the ground up by finding and filling new needs and niches. What first began as a search for the ideal crop for challenging soils has evolved into a multifaceted business that meets new roles by adapting and developing existing farm infrastructure and personal skills
- Diversification has been key to ongoing economic viability, particularly when facing the challenges of unpredictable yields, harvests, and weather
- Being at the forefront of the emerging winery industry was challenging and time consuming, particularly because County governance structures had to develop new policies relevant to and appropriate for the industry
- Ultimately ongoing conversations between winery/vineyard owners and County/municipality staff were critical in developing strong, lasting, and effective policies that are able to embrace and support the County’s winery industry
Colin Campbell is the owner of The Campbell’s Orchards. Key points from his talk are summarized below:

- Colin has been running the family orchard since the age of 21 and is motivated by his fascination in orchards and agriculture. The business has evolved over time to incorporate a broad variety of crops, value-added and local products, and events during its year round operations.
- He identified a number of challenges in successfully running the business including: unpredictable weather, difficulty in finding local labour, competing with large wholesale growers to obtain the newest apple varieties, and the time and resources required to complete government documentation and navigate policies/regulations.
- Diversification, adding value at every step, and providing unique products have been critical to the farm’s success. They market and sell everything grown on the farm to the public, which has allowed them to maintain control of their products and remain economically viable.

**Plenary Summary**

**Viable Farmland: Ontario’s Past, Present, and Future**

*SARA EPP, PhD Candidate & Sessional Lecturer, University of Guelph*

This session explored the evolution of Ontario’s farmland viability during the sectors past, present, and speculation into the future. The presentation considered the challenges, threats, and opportunities for farmland protection throughout time and highlighted key initiatives that support farmland viability. Specific examples from the Niagara region were used to further illustrate the session’s key messages and the session concluded with a positive and hopeful outlook into the future.
Key ideas from Sara’s presentation are summarized below:

The Past

- In some areas, there is a history of strong municipal policies and initiatives to support agricultural viability and local food production
- This support was largely in response to a strong local consumer base and a recognition of the value of food and the area's agricultural capacity
- Over time, the viability of farming and farmland has eroded due to the challenges of extreme farmland prices (highs and lows) and reactive planning and policy decision making with resultant unintended consequences (e.g. retirement lots and ex-urban settlement)

The Present

- The agricultural sector continues to provide a major economic contribution in Ontario and food production as a resource for current and future generations continues to be a priority
- A major challenge to farmland viability is growth pressures via urban encroachment and land use conflicts resulting from the lack of division between agriculture and residential developments
- Residential uses and a lack of understanding by new residents about what normal farming practices involve can complicate agricultural viability
- Land use plans (e.g. Greenbelt Plan) are helping to preserve farmland and promote urban densification but population growth will continue to be a challenge into the future

The Future

- Agricultural expansion and intensification into Northern Ontario looks promising for the future of the sector but farmland viability in the South must be protected as well
- Attention and investment must also be directed toward retaining, recruiting, and training new farmers to work protected farmland
Closing Remarks

The 14th annual Ontario Farmland Forum: Building Farmland Viability in Ontario was a great success! This event focused on the current context on Ontario’s farmland viability and the challenges, opportunities, and tools to build this viability into the future. The sessions provided an opportunity to learn about new tools, strategies, and approaches to protecting and promoting agriculture and farmland from across the Province and across the Country.

The keynote, Kim Grout, shared her insights into farmland protection via the Agricultural Land Reserve in British Columbia. She discussed the governance structure of the ALR, as a provincially legislated land use zone, and its many successes and ongoing challenges in promoting and protecting agricultural uses of farmland. Her experiences resonated with many in the room, as farmland in the ALR continues to face population growth and subdivision pressures but her message was hopeful for a future where farmland continues to be protected and viable as a result of strong and effective policies and legislation.

The Farmland Forum was an excellent opportunity for participants to share experiences and new tools to further build farmland viability in Ontario for present and future generations. Protecting farmland and ensuring its primary use continues to be agriculture is critical for the Province’s environmental and economic sustainability and the dialogue generated at the Forum continues to work towards and support this goal.
Summary of Forum Participants

**Non-Government Representation**
- Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario
- Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
- Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance
- Junior Farmers
- Land Over Landings
- National Farmers Union
- Ontario Land Trust Alliance
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture
- Prince Edward County Wine Growers Association
- Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture
- Quinte Conservation
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

**Municipal Government Representation**
- City of Hamilton
- City of Kawartha Lakes
- City of Markham
- City of Quinte West
- Durham Region
- Halton Region
- Municipality of Clarington
- Municipality of Trent Hills
- Norfolk County
- Peterborough County
- Prince Edward County
- Region of Niagara
- Region of Peel
- The United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry
- Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury
- Town of Greater Napanee
- Township of Asphodel-Norwood
- Township of Whitewater Region
- Township of Springwater

**Provincial Government Representation**
- British Columbia Agricultural Land Commission
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

**Industry Representatives**
- PlanScape
- Cole Engineering Group Limited