



April 1, 2019

Mayor Dave Ryan
City of Pickering
One The Esplanade
Pickering, Ontario L1V 6K7

RE: Toronto East Aerotropolis

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. OFT achieves this through direct land securement, stewardship, policy research and education to benefit all Ontarians.

Ontario's agri-food sector is a major economic engine for the province. In terms of job creation and economic growth, a 2018 report confirmed that the agri-food sector contributes over \$39 billion to Ontario's GDP and employs more than 820,000 Ontarians in the supply chain [1]. This contribution is overwhelmingly significant in rural areas, where roughly 12% of the GDP and 10% of rural jobs are attributed to the farm sector [2]. Ontario is also positioned favourably to attract agricultural and manufacturing investment because it is a global leader in the agri-food industry and houses one of the largest agri-food hubs in North America. This, in turn, generates growth in employment and GDP.

OFT believes that the best use of the remaining North Pickering Federal Lands is permanent agriculture and the protection of existing watersheds and natural areas.

The following section provides greater detail regarding the rationale for keeping the remaining North Pickering Federal Lands in agriculture.

- **Development will permanently destroy productive farmland and agri-food investment potential.** Only 5% of the Canadian land base is prime agricultural land, most of which is located in southern Ontario. The majority of the remaining 8700 acres of the North Pickering Federal Lands are viable for agricultural activity, with primarily Class 1 agricultural lands and 172 current agricultural leases [3]. Losing this land to the Toronto East Aerotropolis is irreversible. With agricultural production as the main economic activity in the rural areas of Durham Region [4], development of the Toronto East Aerotropolis will negatively impact the Region's agri-food economy and agri-food investment potential.



- **Introducing incompatible adjacent land uses makes it more difficult for farmers to run financially sustainable farm businesses and can interrupt normal farm practices.** In 2015 and 2017 approximately 9,900 acres were transferred to Parks Canada Agency (PCA) for the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) [3]. The RNUP is committed to protecting the natural habitat and transitioning the farmlands to permanent, more diversified agriculture that serves a wide range of local markets [5]. With long-term leases and a guaranteed agricultural future, this part of the Federal Lands site promises a return to a more robust agricultural economy in the area, including new local job growth [6]. Introducing an incompatible land use, such as an airport, adjacent to these lands will undermine these efforts and could discourage long-term investment in agriculture on the RNUP lands.
- **Loss of local farmland leads to an increased dependency on food imports and an increased vulnerability to food insecurity.** Without local land there is no local food. With shifting climate patterns and increases in extreme weather events like floods and fires, food imports are at risk. The best defence is a strong local food system. The proximity of the remaining North Pickering Federal Lands to the GTA provides a prime location for a hub of local agricultural lands and associated businesses. Maintaining a strong local food system also increases a municipality's resiliency to climate change.
- **Development will destroy existing watersheds, natural habitats, and ecological services.** There are an estimated 1100 acres of natural amenities on the remaining North Pickering Federal Lands, including wetlands, woodlots, and streams. The annual value of carbon sequestration on these lands is calculated at \$105,000 per annum and the amenities and eco-services, including flood control, water quality, wildlife corridors, and pollinator habitat provided by the natural areas is \$6.1 million each year [6]. Paving over these areas for an airport will permanently remove these benefits, as well as the additional ecological services provided by the land if it remains as farmland.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our feedback on the proposed Toronto East Aerotropolis. Protecting the remaining North Pickering Federal Lands as an agricultural and natural resources hub will benefit Ontario now and into the future. The protection of these lands is the only viable option for supporting a strong agri-food industry, ensuring food security, and protecting against climate change and extreme weather events.

Most Sincerely,

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Cc:

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Mary Delaney, Land Over Landings

References:

- [1] Ontario Federation of Agriculture. 2018. *Agriculture Matters – A Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff*. <https://ofa.on.ca/resources/guide-for-municipal-councillors-and-staff/>
- [2] Ontario Federation of Agriculture. 2013. *Economic Contribution of the Ontario Farm Sector 2013*. <https://ofa.on.ca/resources/economic-contribution-ontario-farm-sector-2013/>
- [3] Government of Canada Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions (Pickering Lands) <https://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/ontario/pickering-2030.html>
- [4] Region of Durham Agriculture. <https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/agriculture.aspx>
- [5] Rouge National Urban Park Management Plan. 2019. <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/on/rouge/info/gestion-management/gestion-management-2019>
- [6] Econometric Research Ltd. And JRG Consulting Group. 2018. *A Future for the Lands: Economic Impact of Remaining Pickering Federal Lands if Returned to Permanent Agriculture*.