



November 9th, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
M7A 1A1

RE: The Greenbelt

Dear Premier Ford,

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. We protect farmland in order to ensure a safe and sustainable food supply for future generations of Ontarians. OFT achieves this through direct land securement, stewardship, policy research, and education.

Ontario's farmland is the base of the province's largest economic sector, the agri-food industry. The agri-food sector in Ontario employs more than 820,000 Ontarians along the supply chain, and annually contributes over \$39 billion to the province's GDP¹. Only 0.5% of Canada's agricultural soil is classified as Class 1. About half of this Class 1 soil is found in Ontario², and the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) alone contains 42% of this Class 1 soil. Agricultural land makes up about half of the total land area of the GGH, and the agricultural industry in this region is critical to the local economy, providing 38,000 jobs, and an annual contribution of \$11 billion to Ontario's economy³. Additionally, the GGH is home to specialty crop areas with microclimates that make it possible to grow crops that cannot be grown commercially anywhere else in the province.

Since 2006, the GGH has lost over 160,000 acres of productive farmland to non-agricultural development⁴. OFT believes that it is crucial to the long-term viability of Ontario's agri-food sector that the fertile farmland in the GGH is permanently protected.

The Greenbelt Plan provides protections for farmland that help strengthen the Agricultural System by preventing non-agricultural development on farmland, which would cause the fragmentation of the agricultural land base. By protecting farmland in the GGH, the Greenbelt has helped to protect the viability of the regional agri-food sector. The GGH is the most populated and fastest growing region in Canada³, which puts significant development pressure on nearby farmland and natural areas. The Greenbelt helps to combat this development pressure on the farmland within its boundaries by providing strong protections for the land, ensuring that there is farmland available to help feed Ontarians today and in the future.



OFT would like to see strengthened support for the Greenbelt to ensure that future generations will have access to farmland and fresh, local food.

Recently, the Province has shown an expanded emphasis on the Agricultural System through changes to provincial plans such as the *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS) and the proposed “Amendment 1” to the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, which OFT would like to commend. The Agricultural System forms a network of agricultural land that prevents fragmentation of the agricultural land base, helping to maintain the viability of the provincial agri-food sector. OFT believes that the Greenbelt is also important to ensuring the long-term viability of agriculture in the province, and that it is able to work in tandem with the Agricultural System to protect some of the most valuable farmland Ontario has to offer.

With the high amount of development pressure that faces farmland in the GGH, OFT appreciates the dedication the Province has shown to upholding the Greenbelt. The proximity of the farmland in the GGH to urban centres in the GTA makes it very desirable for non-agricultural development, and development pressure on this valuable farmland is high. This development pressure will only continue to rise as the region’s population rises, and as such, the protections provided in the Greenbelt are more important than ever. OFT is pleased with the decisions of the Province regarding the Greenbelt thus far, and would like to encourage the Province to continue their support of the Greenbelt in the future.

Additionally, the global COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how important it is to have access to local food. So far, Ontario’s agri-food sector has proven itself to be resilient and durable during a time of crisis. OFT believes that the only way for Ontario’s agricultural industry to remain secure is to protect the agricultural land base.

The protections for farmland in the GGH that the Greenbelt provides ensure that future generations of Ontarians will be able to rely on the province’s ability to produce Ontario-grown food, no matter the circumstances in the future. OFT would also support expanding the Greenbelt to encompass and protect more of Ontario’s valuable, at-risk agricultural land.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for the Greenbelt and the valuable agricultural land it protects. We invite discussion and welcome any questions you might have. We look forward to continuing to work with the Province to strengthen the Agricultural System and to protect the viability of Ontario’s agricultural sector.

Most Sincerely,

Kathryn Enders,
Executive Director, Ontario Farmland Trust
kathryn@ontariofarmlandtrust.ca



Cc:

The Honourable Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable Jeff Yurek, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
David Crombie, Greenbelt Council
Mary Delaney, Land Over Landings
Anne Bell, Ontario Nature
Tim Gray, Environmental Defence
Sarah Bakker, National Farmers Union – Ontario
Keith Currie, Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Suzanne Armstrong, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario

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] Environment Canada. 1976. Canada Land Inventory: Land Capability for Agriculture. [https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10214/15222/LUPSD_land_capability_agric_rep10_1976.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y#:~:text=6.,Class%201%20to%203%20soils\).](https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10214/15222/LUPSD_land_capability_agric_rep10_1976.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y#:~:text=6.,Class%201%20to%203%20soils).)
- [3] Ontario Federation of Agriculture. 2015. Farmland at Risk: How Better Land Use Planning Could Help Ensure a Healthy Future for Agriculture in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. <https://ofa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Farmland-at-risk-How-better-land-use-planning-could-help-ensure-a-healthy-future-for-agriculture-in-the-Greater-Golden-Horseshoe.pdf>
- [4] Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. N.D. Agriculture – Farmland: a finite, non-renewable resource. <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=10864>