ONTARIO FARMLAND TRUST
PROTECTING FARMLAND FOREVER

Annual Report | **2023**

ONTARIO FARMLAND TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Our mission is to protect and preserve Ontario farmlands and associated agricultural, natural, and cultural landscapes of food production for the benefit of Ontarians today and future generations.

About Us

The vision of the Ontario Farmland Trust is for a future where Ontario's farmland is highly valued, where diverse farming communities prosper, and where the permanent protection of farmland supports a strong and sustainable food production system that is recognized as an integral part of a thriving economy.

Since 2004, OFT has been the only provincial-wide land conservation organization dedicated to the protection of farmland. OFT has worked with farmland owners across the province to protect almost 2,700 acres of land across 25 properties. We regularly provide input on provincial land use planning policy, and engage in community outreach and education to spread awareness on the importance of farmland protection. This Annual Report takes a look back at our 2023 activities that continues this legacy. Meanwhile our efforts throughout 2024 have begun which will lead us to achieve our ambitious goals and targets for the future of our mission, aiming to make an even greater difference to protect our food-producing landscapes in Ontario.

Land Acknowledgement

The work of the Ontario Farmland Trust spans across Ontario, which is the traditional territory of many past, present and future First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Our Guelph office resides within the Dish with One Spoon territory and Treaty 3: Between the Lakes Purchase territory, which is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the original and ongoing protectors of these lands. These treaties represent an agreement and respectful partnership between peoples of different nations to live peacefully on the lands and recognize that we all must share and respect Mother Earth's resources. As settler nations work to reconcile our relationships with Indigenous nations, we want our work at the farmland trust to reflect the respect deserved to the legacy of the original caretakers, whose stewardship of the land has allowed us to enjoy the land's beauty and bounty today.

Meet the Team

Staff

Martin Straathof
Executive Director

Rachel Hopf
Fund Development Manager

Joel Enman
Farmland Conservation Specialist

Tamara Brown
Volunteer and Community Engagement Coordinator

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Director

A Year in Review

As we reflect on the past year, we confront the stark realities facing Ontario's farmlands. Both housing and economic pressures are driving decisions to develop on our best farmland. Despite the adversity, we are deeply proud of the strides the Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) has made under the collective effort of our dedicated board, volunteers, staff, and supportive community members.

In 2023, we addressed several proposed policy changes which would have been detrimental to maintaining a viable agricultural system. We saw a continued surge in farmland prices—an 11% increase on top of the substantial rises in the preceding years compounded by a significant wave of retiring farmers, posing a critical question of who will farm our most fertile grounds into the future. This trend not only underscores the persistent threat to our best agricultural lands but also highlights the systemic challenges that challenge the future of our agri-food sector.

This past year, more landowners than ever reached out to OFT, eager to safeguard their properties. In response, we crafted an ambitious strategic plan poised to set a record for conservation easements over the next five years. Our initiatives now include innovative approaches to preserve farmland—updating our easements to support modern agricultural activities while safeguarding conservation values, and spearheading a method to develop local farmland preserves to accelerate the protection of these precious lands.

As OFT worked on our first donation of farmland, a truly historical occasion, we began exploring our position as a land trust to develop and offer a Land Access program, marking a significant step toward addressing the barriers faced by new and young farmers entering the sector.

We encourage everyone to visit our website to learn more about our strategic plan and how you can support these vital initiatives. Our achievements are made possible by our supporters—those who believe in our vision and contribute their time, treasure, and talent to our cause. Since its inception in 2004 (20 years ago as of July 2024), OFT has been a testament to the power of community and shared commitment to preserving our agricultural landscapes for future generations.

Together, we are not just protecting land; we are nurturing a legacy of resilience and sustainability that will enrich our province for years to come. It is our privilege to lead such a forward-thinking organization and to work alongside each of you in this vital mission.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to Ontario Farmland Trust.

Margaret Walton
Board Chair

Martin Straathof
Executive Director

2023 Achievements

Navigated the process of receiving our **1st** fee-simple donation of land

Engaged with over **2,380** people across Ontario

48+ articles in the media featuring OFT. Plus **6** features via radio, press conference, and podcast

Facilitated **4** online webinars with 585 attendees, and 100s of further viewings on YouTube

Welcomed **554** new subscribers to our e-newsletter list

Received **33** landowner inquiries about protecting their farmland

Education & Outreach

2023 Farmland Forum

The forum is a wonderful opportunity for planners, researchers, municipal staff, students, farmers, and conservationists to gather and discuss important issues in the agricultural sector. 2023 marked our 18th annual Farmland Forum, and our first ever hybrid forum, with 99 attendees in person and over 100 online.

The 2023 theme was *Planning to Save the Soil*. As an organization dedicated to protecting farmland, we recognize that farmland and its ability to produce food and provide other ecological services cannot be taken for granted. We also recognize that when we aim to protect farmland, we are aiming to protect the very foundation of farmland itself: the soil.

Keynote speakers included Dr. Kari Dunfield from the University of Guelph, and Celeste Smith from Cultural Seeds Consulting. Additionally, two panels were held to discuss the topics of *Right to Soil: Reimagining Complete Communities,* and *Nourishing the Land*. Presentations throughout the day explored the impact soil has in our lives, for food production, as well as the complexities that make it one of the most important community resources. Discussion centered on the complexity of soil microorganisms and processes, the myriad of soil health friendly farming practices, innovative ideas in planning and policy to protect Ontario's soils, and an Indigenous lens in looking at science, soil and food systems, reshaping the way attendees see and value soil. Thank you to all of the sponsors, speakers and volunteers for making this event such a success!

Planning for the 2024 forum began immediately afterwards, as we gathered feedback and input from attendees and our volunteers. Our Policy & Education Committee decided on the theme *The Future of Farmland,* to be held in hybrid format in Elora, Ontario and online in March 2024!

Educational Workshops

OFT's new Winter Webinars series was launched in fall 2023, highlighting farmland protection topics throughout the fall and winter months. Attendance to all sessions was high, and attendees participated with questions and discussions throughout all topics. All of these webinars are available online to view.

May 2023: *Lunch learn and take action, impacts of new PPS*
Oct 2023: *Balancing Farmland Protection & Housing*
Nov 2023: *Protection Options with OFT*
Dec 2023: *Innovative Conservation Approaches*

Stay tuned for our next webinar series launching Fall 2024.

Community Outreach

In 2023, we hosted a table at five events across Ontario, talking with over 275 concerned community members and farmers about farmland protection and provincial policy changes. Events included the Northumberland Forum on Protecting Farmland, the Wellington Farmers Market, Canada's Outdoor Farm Show, the Toronto Patagonia Store, and the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) Conference.

Canada's Outdoor Farm Show

The Canada's Outdoor Farm Show once again provided OFT with an exciting opportunity to be at the largest outdoor farm show in Eastern Canada. Each year, the Canada Outdoor Farm Show hosts 40,000 attendees and more than 700 exhibitors. This was an opportunity for the Ontario Farmland Trust to promote ourselves at an event that is well attended by farmers and other agricultural industry representatives. We had over 130 people stop to chat, sparking many conversations about farmland protection. Our team is looking forward to attending again September 10-12, 2024!

Volunteer Program

With the support of The Gosling Foundation and the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA), OFT had capacity to revamp our volunteer program, ensuring we had robust and thorough policies and procedures in place to be able to welcome passionate volunteers to the OFT team in a variety of meaningful roles across the organization. The end of 2023 saw the soft launch of the program, which is currently active and continues to see more volunteers join OFT's mission.

Farmland Policy

OFT remained a strong voice for farmland protection in Ontario throughout 2023 and submitted six policy-related comments to the provincial government, as listed below. We advocated for increased protections for farmland, and against policy changes that would negatively impact farmland, the agricultural sector, and the environment through various policy submissions, meetings with elected officials at different levels of government, and in our outreach activities. Our work resulted in several media interviews and news released resulting in OFT being featured in over 48 news articles in 2023, including 19 editorials authored, and 6 features on the radio, press conferences or podcasts.

ERO #019-7735 - New Act regarding the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve easements and covenants

OFT advocates for reinstatement of Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP) easements, recommends becoming easement holder.

ERO #019-6813 Submission Bill 97 - Agricultural Lot Severances; Agricultural Systems; Intensification, MCR and Settlement Area Expansion

Alongside a joint effort from Ontario's agricultural organizations, OFT submitted comments to the Environmental Registry of Ontario, citing our concerns over the effects that Bill 97 will have on farmland.

Open Letter to Premier Ford

The Ontario Farmland Trust wrote to Premier Doug Ford about the future of Ontario's agri-food system. Martin Straathof, OFT Executive Director, cited concerns over the effects that the current rate of farmland loss will have for future generations of farmers and non-farmers alike. OFT offered expertise in the area of agriculture and farmland conservation, and is seeking to engage in collaborative solutions to the issues we are facing today in Ontario.

Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve - Federal Action Needed to Protect the Integrity of Rouge National Park Ecology & Agriculture

OFT called for the federal government to take action to protect the farmland contained within the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP). After significant work raising awareness of the issues, the province reversed its decision to save DRAP reinstating the conservation easements and added them back to the Greenbelt.

Thank You to our donors, monthly Friends of Farmland, members, and supporters

You are helping to save farmland in Ontario today so that future generations can rely on it tomorrow.

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In Honour

Luca's Educators and support team
Region of Halton Farmers
Myron R. Rogers

In Memoriam

Robert Allworth
Glen Marrison
Wilhelm and Barnhild Pfenning
Douglas K. Redner

Properties Focus

Our First Donation of Farmland!

In Tiverton, Ontario, sits a 37-acre property that serves as the Ontario Farmland Trust's first donation of farmland! This exciting milestone for OFT began in mid-2022 when OFT responded to a news article about the late landowners' desire to donate the property to a charity.

The late Ann and Eugene Bourgeois owned and operated the farm as a fair trade wool business where they raised and sheared sheep, spun the wool and sold woolen products. It was Eugene Bourgeois' hope that his farm would not be sold upon his death but instead used to make a lasting contribution for public good. OFT hopes to honour Anne and Eugene's legacy by offering a space where new and young farmers can begin to establish their farm businesses while keeping the ecological features of the property intact. The Philosopher's Wool Company which was founded by the Bourgeois' will continue to operate on the property.

The property offers distinct habitat for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife with mature trees, a river, a stream, protected riparian habitats, ephemeral wetlands, and farmland currently being used for hay and pastureland that is capable of acting as grassland habitat. The property is home to species at risk including Barn Swallows, Monarch butterflies and the endangered Butternut tree.

The donation was completed in February 2024. This property will now be managed by OFT and will eventually provide equitable land access to prime agricultural land as well as serve as an educational space for agriculture and nature access. Stay tuned for more updates on the Bourgeois property!

Species Spotlight: Eastern Wood-Pewee

The Eastern Wood-Pewee is a small forest dwelling bird typically living in edge habitats in deciduous forests commonly found on farm properties. You are more likely to hear the Eastern Wood-Pewee before you see them as they have a distinct song that sounds like "pee-a-wee."

Eastern Wood-Pewees are provincially listed as special concern, and have been observed on 11 farms protected by Ontario Farmland Trust conservation easements.

Our Most Recent Conservation Easement Agreement: Hazell Farm

Amidst the serene landscapes of Prince Edward County, the Hazell Farm stands as a testament to the coexistence of agriculture and nature.

Spanning just over 93 acres, the Hazell farm is not just a place of production but an important space for biodiversity. The agricultural areas of the Hazell farm include grazing alpaca and hay production, and are nesting sites for species at risk including the Barn Swallow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark.

What sets the Hazell Farm apart is its commitment to sustainability. Off the grid, the farm relies solely on wind and solar energy. Its landscape is as diverse as it is stunning, including a hardwood woodlot, a creek, and a natural beach that is intertwined with pastures. The diverse landscape is also home to other species at risk such as the Monarch butterfly and the Midland Painted Turtle.

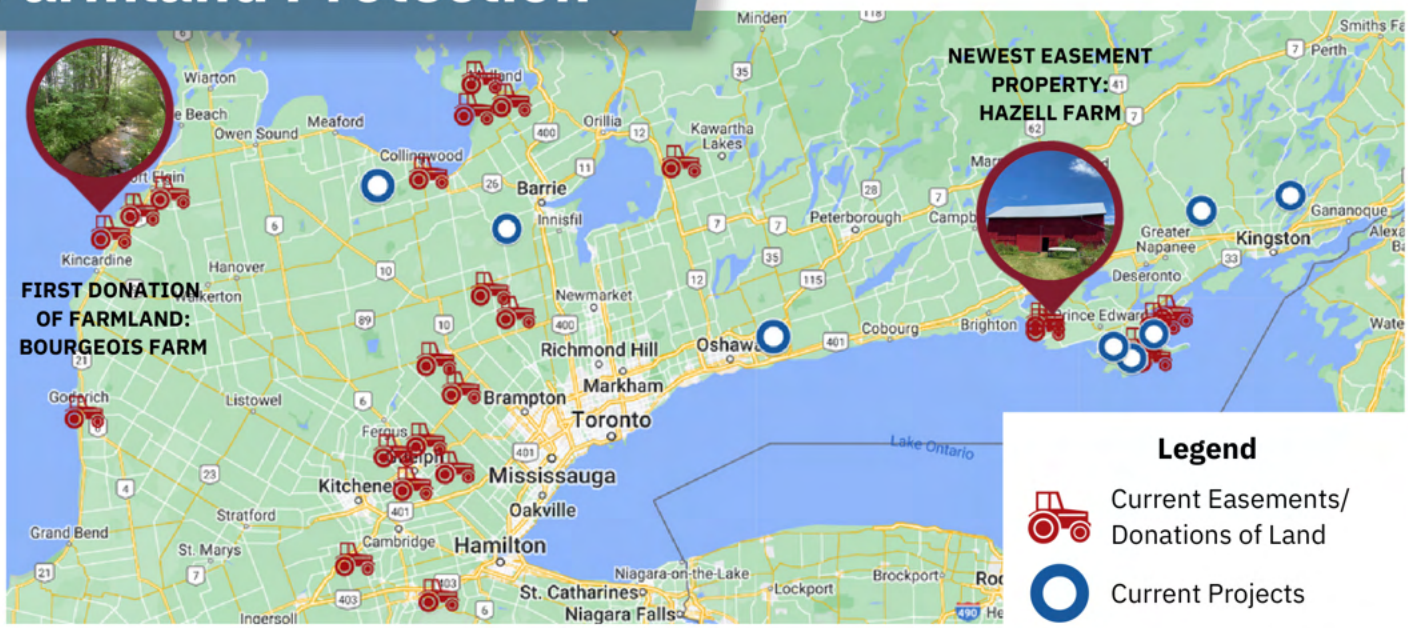
In 1998, Dee Hazell became the owner and steward of this remarkable property. It was Dee's love of the land that led her to connect with OFT in 2021. Not only did she want to see the farmland remain farmland, she also wanted to ensure the land remained affordable for the next generation. Amidst mounting pressures of development in Prince Edward County, the protection of this farmland (finalized in March 2024), ensures its legacy as an area for production as well as a haven for biodiversity.

With its diverse landscape and its commitment to sustainability, the Hazell Farm serves as a reminder that through stewardship and dedication, we can forge a more harmonious relationship with the land.

Species Spotlight: Midland Painted Turtle

The Midland Painted Turtle is one of 8 turtle species native to Ontario. Midland Painted Turtles are characterized by their distinctive red and yellow lines marking their body and red or orange markings on the shell. These turtles are federally listed as special concern and have been observed on 3 farms protected by Ontario Farmland Trust conservation easements.

Farmland Protection

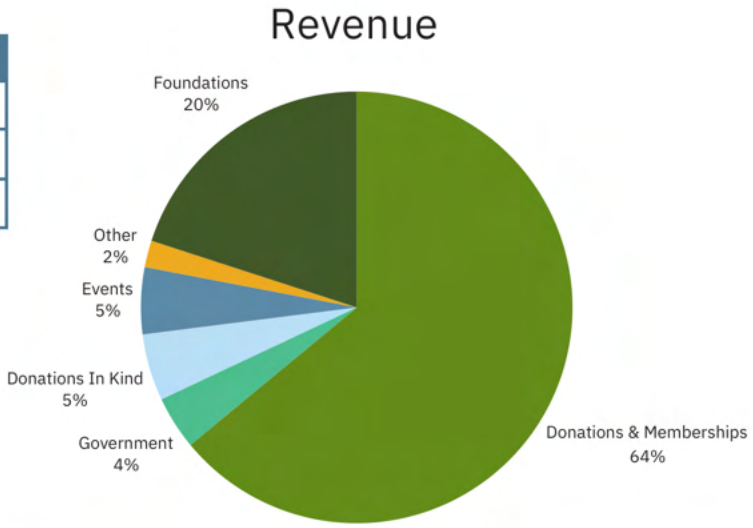


Financials 2023

	Audited 2023	Audited 2022
Revenue	$394,259*	$293,123*
Expenses	$371,067	$342,926
Excess (Deficiency)	$23,192	$-49,803

*In-kind value of easement properties received in fiscal year omitted from revenue total

- Foundations
- Donations & Memberships
- Government
- Donations In Kind
- Events
- Other



Collaborations & Partnerships

Partnerships are essential to the Ontario Farmland Trust, and we deeply value them. In 2023, we connected with numerous organizations and partnered on various projects, both small and large, in order to amplify our work with protecting a greater amount of farmland. We released joint statements on public policy, and we are participating in various coalitions, working groups and other groups to further the conservations and help create action.

Collaborating with other organizations, businesses, and individuals allows us to amplify our impact, share knowledge, and work towards common goals. Our partnerships help us protect farmland and promote sustainable agriculture practices, which are critical to maintaining a healthy environment and supporting local communities. We are grateful for our partners' contributions and are committed to continuing to build strong relationships that will benefit farmland preservation and agriculture for generations to come.

What's on the Horizon?

The Ontario Farmland Trust is ramping up its efforts towards protecting and preserving the agricultural and natural features of Ontario's farmland.

There is an increasing interest from farmers and landowners who want to protect their land forever with conservation easements. We are currently working with eight landowners on conservation easement projects to protect an additional 1,200 acres of agricultural land and natural habitat.

With 45+ landowners currently considering a conservation easement agreement, and another five landowners currently considering donating their land, OFT is planning to grow in ways that will support our ambitious goals and targets for the future of our mission. Increasing our land securement efforts will significantly contribute to the preservation of farmland throughout the province.

And, as always, OFT will continue to work to strengthen provincial policy to ensure the viability and sustainability of Ontario's agricultural sector.

It is our belief that these combined efforts will help promote the sustainable management of Ontario's agricultural resources, including the associated natural and cultural features, for the benefit of Ontarians today and future generations.

Share the Mission!

As we enter 2024, we are coming into our 20th year! Looking back, we have supported multiple farmers and communities across Ontario to protect farmland, natural features, and species at risk. Right now, an immense area of farmland in southern Ontario is at risk. Our team is poised to spotlight this issue, but we need your help. We need to increase awareness of OFT and what it does for the future health of our communities in Ontario. We need a movement.

Here's how you can help!

While the farmland community knows the value of OFT, your networks of friends and family may not. This is an opportunity for you to share with them why you have supported this program. By following our social media, you can relay our messages to your contacts. By advocating for OFT, you will help spread the word and bring individuals closer to our mission. And if by sharing our mission, you are asked how they can help, please ask them to make a donation via our website and pass along the information they have learned to someone new. It's that simple!

We know how much Ontario farmlands mean to our future. Let's share the message far and wide, so that the rest of Ontario knows too!

If you have any questions about our efforts, or would like to volunteer your time, ideas or resources to this effort, please reach out to us at info@ontariofarmlandtrust.ca. We would love to hear from you!

ONTARIO FARMLAND TRUST
PROTECTING FARMLAND FOREVER

c/o University of Guelph
50 Stone Road East
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

(519) 781-3276 (FARM)

info@ontariofarmlandtrust.ca

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