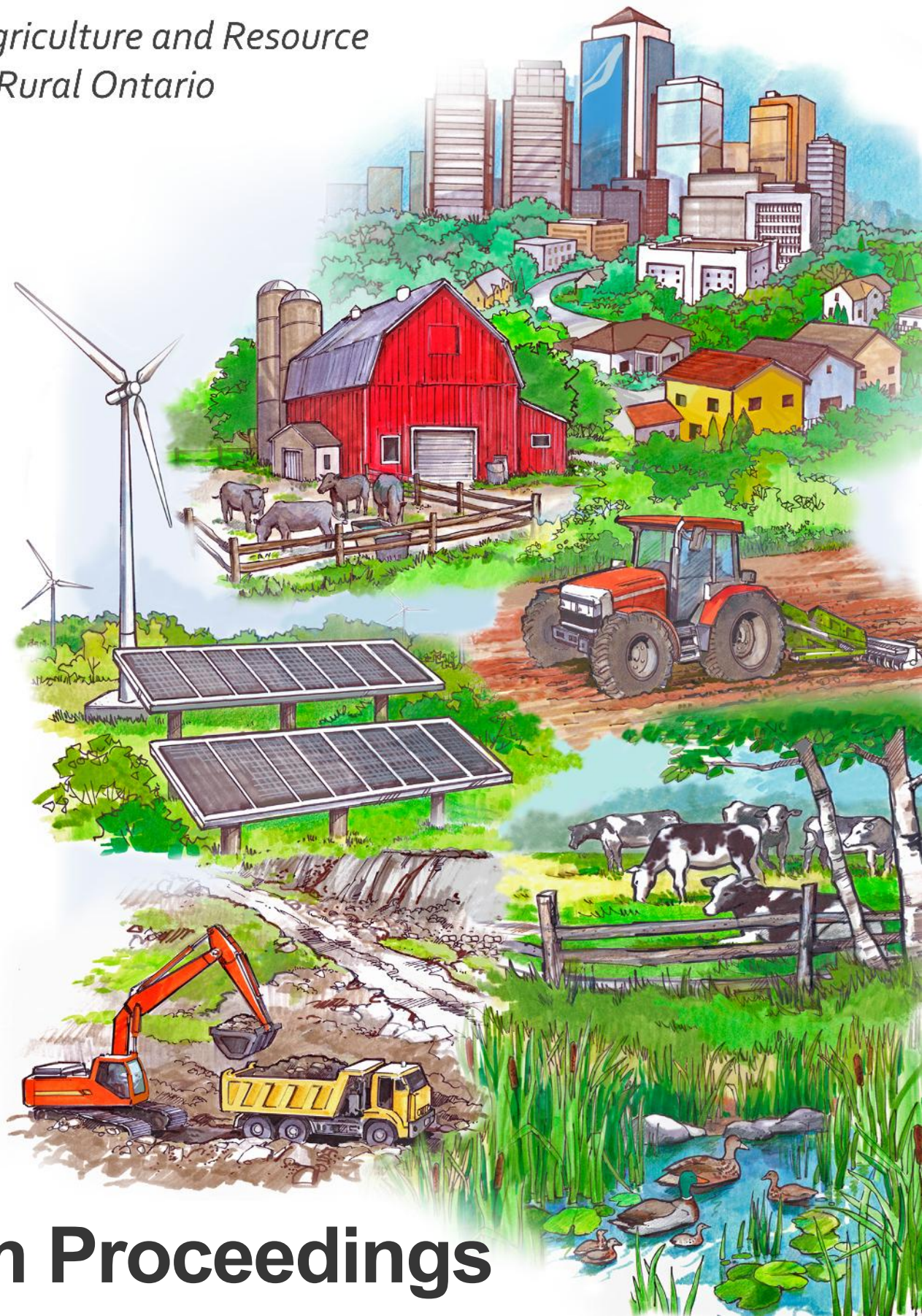


2012 Farmland Preservation Forum

*Balancing Agriculture and Resource
Demands in Rural Ontario*



Forum Proceedings



2012 Farmland Preservation Forum

Balancing Agriculture and Resource Demands in Rural Ontario

February 17, 2012

About the Forum

The Farmland Trust's 2012 forum brought together 150 farmers, municipal elected officials, planners, provincial policy-makers and land conservation advocates from across the province to discuss intensifying land use demands in rural Ontario, share concerns and experiences, and brainstorm new ways to support both rural economic development and protection of Ontario's best farmlands.

Policies that guide urban growth, mineral aggregate extraction, infrastructure developments, green energy projects and protection of endangered species all have significant impacts on agricultural operations and the well-being of rural communities. The result is often frustration among residents and rural municipal leaders, and particularly farmers whose businesses can be negatively affected by excessive regulation and permanent loss of the agricultural land they depend on.

This year's Farmland Preservation Forum acknowledged these concerns and focused on innovations in policy and planning for agriculture within Ontario's diverse countryside economy, recognizing the need to work collectively to shape new policy directions that understand the unique needs of farmers and rural communities, and attract appropriate development to rural Ontario.

Panel and small group discussions sparked collaborative dialogue among forum participants and enabled new ideas to emerge. Niagara Region was also profiled as a case study on innovative policy development in support of local agriculture. Ten key policy issues and recommendations were identified through forum presentations and group discussions, and are included in these proceedings.

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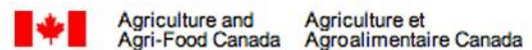


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Forum Program and Presentations

Click on hyperlinks below to view complete power point presentations from the forum.

Opening Remarks

- Stew Hilts, Chair, Ontario Farmland Trust
- Michael Chong, Member of Parliament, Wellington, Halton Hills
- Chris White, Warden, Wellington County; Past Chair, Rural Ontario Municipal Assn.

How Much Land is Enough?

- Matt Setzkorn, Policy Coordinator, Ontario Farmland Trust
[Calculating Potential Food Self-Sufficiency in Ontario](#) (see summary below)

Panel//Countryside Conflict? Agriculture among Competing Land Use Demands

- Nathan Stevens, Policy Advisor, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario
[Agriculture and Farmland Preservation as a Provincial Priority](#)
- Faye Langmaid, Manager of Special Projects, Planning Services, Municipality of Clarington
[Planning for Population Growth alongside Agriculture \(Speaking Notes\)](#)
- Carl Cosack, Rancher; Chair, North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce
[Protecting Agriculture and Aggregate Resources \(Speaking Notes\)](#)
- Ted Cowan, Farm Policy Researcher, Ontario Federation of Agriculture
[Land Requirements for Green Energy Projects](#)
- Pat Learmonth, Farmer; Director, Farms at Work; Member, Kawartha Farm Stewardship Collaborative
[Stewardship on the Farm: Challenges and Opportunities](#)
- Norm Ragetlie, Director of Policy, Rural Ontario Institute; OFT Board Member

Panel Moderator

Group Discussion//Striking the Balance: Discovering Solutions through Dialogue

- Erika Bailey, Erika Lee Bailey & Associates

Facilitator

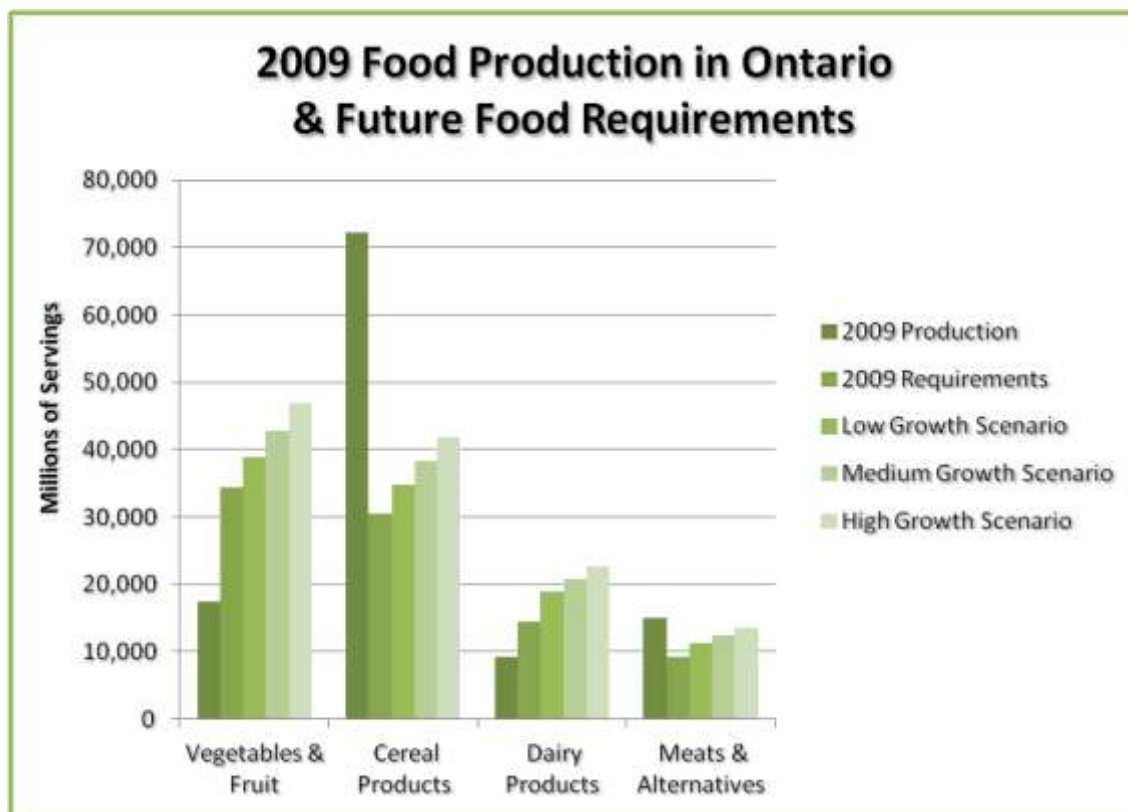
Shaping Fair Agricultural Policy within Diverse Landscapes: Learning from Niagara

- Patrick Robson, Commissioner, Integrated Community Planning, Niagara Region
[Planning for Agriculture in Niagara](#)
- Bill Hodgson, Mayor, Town of Lincoln
Seeing Agriculture as a Community Asset
- Jim Brandle, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre
[The Future of Innovation in Agriculture](#)

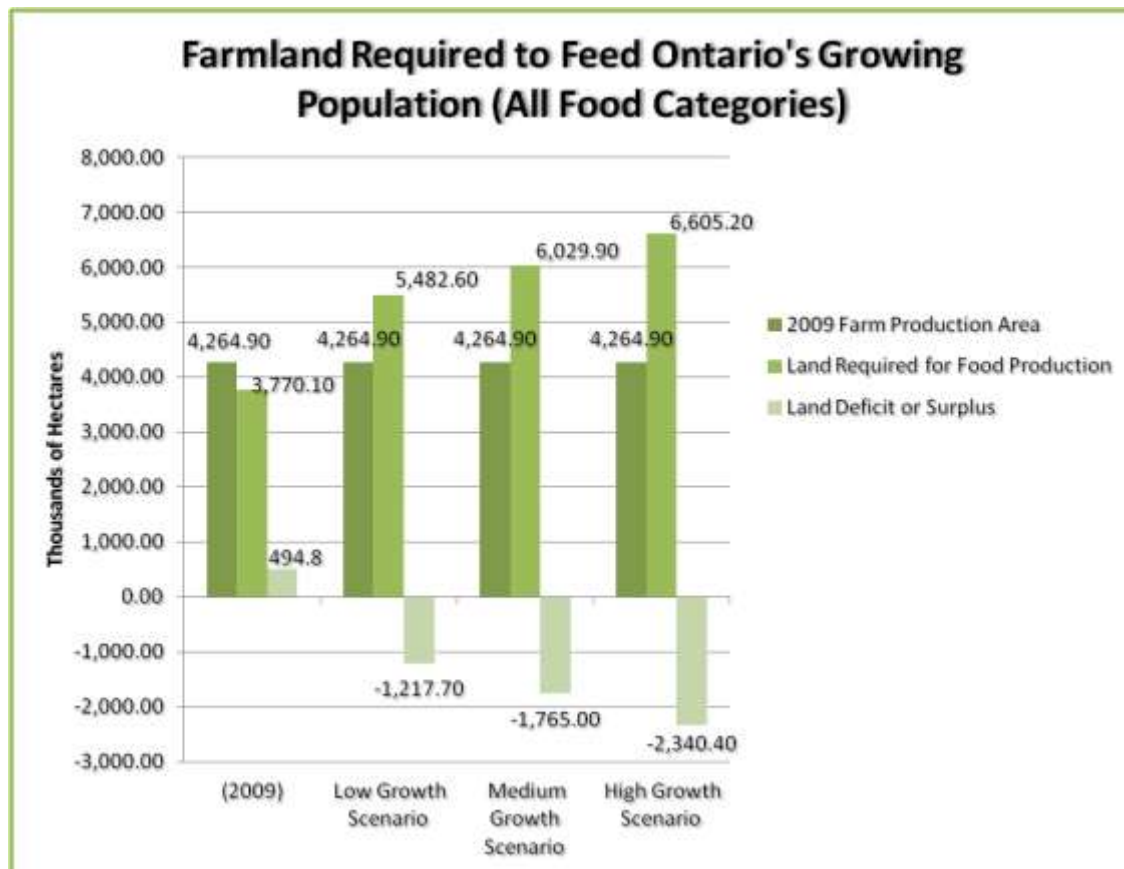
Calculating Potential Food Self-Sufficiency in Ontario: Presentation Summary

To begin the forum dialogue, the Farmland Trust announced the results of its 2011 study on calculating potential food self-sufficiency in Ontario. The study sought to quantify the amount of farmland required to feed Ontario's population today and for the next 25 years. University of Guelph geographer, Dr. Charlotte McCallum, developed a rigorous methodology to determine *Farmland Requirements for Ontario's Growing Population to 2036*, comparing existing agricultural production with food needs and projected population growth trends.

To create an effective empirical model, several assumptions had to be made, including: all Ontario residents prescribing to an ideal diet based on Canada's Food Guide, no change in the amount of land available for food production, no change in farm productivity, no food wastage, no imports of food products or commodities, no affect of climate change, etc. With all of these things being held constant in the model, population change over time could become a focus, examining change in potential food self-sufficiency associated with different population growth scenarios. Statistics Canada offers low, medium and high growth scenarios, with Ontario's population rising by 3.1, 4.68 and 6.8 million, respectively, by the year 2036.



A comparison of food production and consumption in Ontario in 2009, and in all population growth scenarios, demonstrates a shortage of vegetable, fruit and dairy production, with excess production of cereal products and meat.



Taking a closer look at the farmland required to sustain production of food for Ontario's population, 2009 shows a slight surplus of 494,800 hectares. There is a growing deficit in land in the low, medium and high growth scenarios, however, given growing food needs. In the highest growth scenario, the farmland deficit may be as high as 2.3 million hectares. The 2009 farm production area includes all crops grown in Ontario, including land in hay and fodder.

The Farmland Requirements study indicates that Ontario may lose its ability to be self-sufficient in food production within the next 25 years – one generation from now. This raises questions about how we value home-grown food and Ontario's limited farmland resources. Is food self-sufficiency important to us? Are there new opportunities to draw Ontario farm production and food consumption together more closely? Are we doing enough to support agriculture and farmland protection in our communities? This presentation set the stage for the rest of the forum conversation, which is captured below through the top 10 policy issues and recommendations brought forward through the panel, group discussions and the Niagara presentations.

Reaching for Balance: Seeking Opportunities for Enhancing Farm Viability and Protection of Farmland

Top 10 Policy Issues and Recommendations Identified by Forum Participants:

1. Provincial policy seems to be lagging in its ability to support agriculture and address the needs of farming communities, compared to leadership and innovation in agricultural policy being developed locally or regionally (eg. Niagara Region)

Recommendation: Take initiative, demonstrate to the Province where policy needs to be improved, and work with the Province to shape new policy directions. Seize opportunities to inform policy development during reviews (eg. 10-year review of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt in 2015)

2. Ontario's agricultural sector is very diverse. The types of production, the size of farm operations and the intensity of land use varies widely between municipalities and regions. Broad provincial policies don't always serve the unique needs of agriculture in every community.

Recommendation: Bring together the local agricultural community, municipal planners and other residents and municipal staff interested in local food, health and land conservation to create a vision for the future of agriculture in your local municipality or region. This could be formalized as a task force or working group. Establish principles and set goals; identify areas where there may be policy barriers or a need for improved policy.

Recommendation: Use provincial policy as a starting point and build on this framework to create local policies that provide better clarity and support to farm and agriculture-related businesses in your community, with consideration for the unique needs of local agriculture (eg. Niagara Region's 'Value-Add On-Farm' policies; development and application of rural or agricultural Community Improvement Plans).

3. Highly-productive agricultural lands, local farm businesses and other community agricultural resources continue to be lost to urban expansion.

Recommendation: Alongside the farming community, improve the Provincial Policy Statement, section 1.1.3.9, to bring clarification to ambiguous terms such as "no reasonable alternatives" and "mitigated to the extent feasible" that planning authorities face when a municipality is considering expansion of settlement areas.

- How should planning authorities interpret this policy? What is reasonable? What alternatives are to be considered, and to what extent? How are impacts on agricultural operations measured and mitigated appropriately?

Recommendation: Create a new tax on any 'change of land use' or 'greenfield' development; this could be embedded in the Land Transfer Tax. The new tax would encourage denser urban development, slow urban sprawl onto farmlands and provide a greater source of revenue needed by municipalities to maintain infrastructure and to service new developments.

Recommendation: Establish a development-offsetting or Transfer of Development Credits system that sees new development fees being directed toward a program that works with farmers to protect farmland in critical areas through

targeted compensation or incentives. This may also encourage more efficient use of urban land with denser developments.

- 4.** Provincial policy permits mineral aggregate extraction within prime agricultural areas, undermining planning for agriculture and investment in farm infrastructure, and resulting in loss of valuable farmland.

Recommendation: Provide greater protections for agriculture and farmland from aggregate developments within the Provincial Policy Statement. Mandate that new quarry sites and aggregate pits be required to locate outside of prime agricultural areas.

- 5.** In most areas of the province, the Ontario planning system fails to provide permanent protection of farmland and the long-term stability needed to sustain a vibrant agricultural industry. Approvals granted for land use changes or new developments can be political decisions and subject to local or provincial motivations that may not be in the best interest of the public or the agricultural community.

Recommendation: Introduce a farmland conservation easement program that supports farmers and protects farmland in a way that reinforces broader public policy and planning for agriculture. Agricultural easements should be held by a non-government organization like the Ontario Farmland Trust that is distanced from political influences and has a specific mandate for farmland protection. The program could be directed toward protection of priority areas of provincial interest, similar to the proposed Niagara Tender Fruitlands Program of 1994.

- 6.** Currently, significant land use disputes are directed to the Ontario Municipal Board for final resolution, which is an expensive, cumbersome and disempowering process for rural municipalities and community groups. These local groups often have to defend their interests against those of international companies and large developers, which typically have greater financial resources and are motivated more strongly by profit than a community's social well-being or environmental protection. The automatic OMB route for resolving disputes also does not encourage creativity or inspire collaboration between communities and development interests.

Recommendation: Reform the process for resolving land use disputes in a way that introduces a social component to policy and fully engages communities when large development projects are being proposed (eg. green energy, aggregate projects, etc.). This could be achieved by making a community referendum the final decision point rather than the OMB, for example, or including this as part of the process.

- 7.** For many small-scale farming operations and small farm start-up businesses, the standard 100 acre parcel size is excessive and unaffordable.

Recommendation: Set up a task force including provincial policy-makers, agricultural organizations and planners to research potential for leveraging the Condominiums Act for application in rural or agricultural areas in a way that permits clustering of small farm operations within a condominium structure; launch a pilot to test the new model.

- 8.** Green energy developments across rural Ontario are being approved through the Green Energy Act without meaningful consultation with local municipalities, planners or residents,

which has led to intense conflict and rifts within and between communities and the Province.

Recommendation: The Province needs to reform the Green Energy Act and green energy development approval process to fully engage the communities that may be impacted by such developments, including local planners and elected officials that represent community interests.

Recommendation: The relationship between the Green Energy Act, the Provincial Policy Statement and the Planning Act needs to be more clearly defined, establishing land use priorities for green energy among other provincial interests.

9. Large-scale solar “farms” are receiving development approvals across Ontario on prime farmlands and within agricultural areas, fragmenting the farming landscape and resulting in loss of productive farm soils.

Recommendation: Expand prohibition of large-scale solar developments on Class 1 and 2 soils to also include Classes 3 and 4 through the Green Energy Act.

10. Farmers are committed to land and water stewardship and consequently contribute many ecological goods and services to society (clean air, clean water, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, etc.) through on-farm beneficial management practices. A growing list of new provincial policies and regulations for source water protection, endangered species protection, etc., and associated paperwork and penalties, however, are becoming a major source of frustration among farmers. In some cases, this frustration has led to a sense of being targeted and a fear of fines or jail time for accidentally violating policy (eg. disturbing habitat the farmer was unaware contained endangered species). This regulatory environment is resulting in farmers feeling discouraged or unmotivated to independently pursue farm stewardship initiatives.

Recommendation: Create a provincial ombudsman or advisory structure that engages the farm community early in the policy development process. Work together, seeking to establish the intention of any new legislation and mitigating negative impacts new legislation may have at the farm level.

Recommendation: Create incentive programs that celebrate farmers’ strong stewardship ethic and reward on-farm stewardship activities.

- Reinvigorate the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan with a commitment of new and expanded funding to support land and water stewardship on Ontario farms.
- Work with farmers, conservation groups, municipal partners and the Province to develop regional ‘payment for ecological goods and services’ pilot projects, similar to Norfolk County’s Alternative Land Use Services program.
- Many farmers, conservation advocates and rural residents are rallying around stewardship and volunteering countless hours to supporting stewardship activities (eg. Kawartha Farm Stewardship Collaborative). Provide capacity building support to local groups that are actively coordinating stewardship projects and leading these community engagement initiatives.

In Summary

Communities all across Ontario are faced with the challenge of protecting farmland and sustaining and enhancing agriculture in the face of other land use and resource demands, both in near-urban and rural areas. Planning for agriculture is complex, but municipalities have a strong and growing interest in effectively navigating and interpreting provincial policy, and creating local policies, that reflect the unique needs of the local agricultural sector and support long-term farm viability.

The ten policy issues and associated recommendations listed above that were expressed by forum participants indicate concerns and ideas that are top-of-mind among farmers, municipal elected officials and planners, and require attention in ongoing policy development at all levels of government. Given the wide representation from communities across Ontario, from the east, through the central, western and southern parts of the province (see list below), these proceedings provide a unique snapshot of current municipal sentiment toward agricultural land use policy.

Leadership, education, engagement and collaboration were key themes throughout the forum presentations and discussion. It was acknowledged that, while application and interpretation of policy is primarily ‘top-down,’ policy development happens from the ‘bottom-up’ through strong leadership at the municipal level. This is made possible through engagement of farmers, planners and other residents and municipal staff interested in local food, health, economic development and land conservation. Setting a community vision for food and agriculture, and developing local policies that support agriculture becomes the foundation from which to inform and help shape larger provincial policy.

Education was also seen as critical to moving policy forward and building awareness of the unique needs of the agricultural sector. Telling honest and good-news stories about our rural communities, local food, farm stewardship, farmland protection and innovation in agriculture will help the public, and political leaders, appreciate and value Ontario agriculture, understand the realities rural communities face and see stronger connections between food, health and the land.

At the end of the day, forum participants indicated a strong desire to align with common policy and planning goals for agriculture and the sustainability of rural communities, including an understanding that policy should:

- Prioritize the protection of farmland as a finite and highly valuable resource of local, provincial and national significance;
- Create circumstances that enhance farm profitability for all sizes, types and intensities of production;
- Preserve the integrity of agricultural areas by reducing uncertainty and preventing land use conflicts;
- Recognize that it is in the best public interest to preserve the ability to be self-sufficient in food production; and
- Seek to achieve long-term social, environmental and economic sustainability, acknowledging that the countryside and rural-agricultural communities provide the foundation for Ontario’s prosperity.

List of Forum Participants

Non-Government Representation

Rural Ontario Institute
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario
Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee
Peel Region Federation of Agriculture
Wellington Federation of Agriculture
York Federation of Agriculture
National Farmers Union
Greater Toronto Agricultural Action Committee
Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee
Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society
Ontario Farmland Preservation
North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce
Land over Landings
AWARE Simcoe
Sustain Ontario
FarmStart
Farms at Work
Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
Metcalf Foundation
Heifer International Canada
Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust
Niagara Land Trust Foundation

Conservation Ontario
Credit Valley Conservation
Hamilton Conservation Authority
Rare Charitable Research Reserve
Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
Carolinian Canada
Trees Unlimited
Professional Foresters Association
University of Guelph, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
Ryerson University
University of Toronto
University of Waterloo
York University
Vineland Research and Innovation Centre
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
AMEC
Dufferin Biz
Ecoplans
GSP Group Inc.
MHBC Planning
Planning Solutions Inc.
Royal LePage Meadowtown Realty
SENES Consultants Ltd
SERA
Solray Energy

Municipal Representation

Amaranth Township
Town of Amherstburg
City of Belleville
Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury
Town of Caledon
Township of Cavan Monaghan
Municipality of Clarington
Township of East Garafraxa
County of Grey
Haldimand County
Town of Halton Hills
Halton Region
City of Hamilton
County of Lambton
Town of Lincoln
Township of Malahide
Town of Markham
Melancthon Township
County of Middlesex

Town of Milton
Niagara Region
Norfolk County
City of Ottawa
County of Oxford
Region of Peel
County of Peterborough
County of Prince Edward
Township of Puslinch
City of Sarnia
County of Simcoe
Township of South West Oxford
Township of Wainfleet
Region of Waterloo
Township of Wellesley
Wellington County
Township of West Lincoln
The Regional Municipality of York

Provincial Representation

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs – Environmental & Land Use Policy
Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Legislation & Research
Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Greater Golden Horseshoe & Greenbelt
Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Planning Innovation
Ontario Ministry of Transportation