



ONTARIO FARMLAND TRUST
PROTECTING FARMLAND FOREVER

Ontario Farmland Trust
Strategic Plan
2024 - 2029

Approved: June 8, 2023

Our Vision

Our vision 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.

Our Mission

The Mission of the Ontario Farmland Trust 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.

Our Objectives

- i) to protect and preserve farmlands and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features in the countryside for the benefit of current and future generations
- ii) to acquire, secure, manage and otherwise deal with farmlands, interests in lands, and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features
- iii) to research and educate about the value, management, use and protection of farmlands and associated agricultural, natural and cultural features
- iv) to receive, manage and disburse funds, donations and bequests to foster cooperation with individuals, organizations, agencies and others having similar aims

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.

Our Values

- Integrity -

OFT acts with **INTEGRITY** by being **honest, transparent and accountable** in our dealings so we will remain **credible** and contribute to a **just and equitable society**

- Respect -

OFT **RESPECTS** one another, the land, and the history of those who stewarded the land so that we may enjoy its bounty and we will **honour** their **legacy** through our work for the betterment of **future generations**

- Collaboration-

OFT believes **COLLABORATION** with different **partners** is important for amplifying the impact of our work so everyone in Ontario benefits, which means we embrace a **diversity** of **stakeholders** to ensure the **inclusion** of many **different voices**

- Creativity -

OFT believes that fostering **CREATIVITY** supports **unique** and **hopeful** solutions for a sustainable future

- Sustainability -

OFT values **SUSTAINABILITY** of our **natural capital**, including **soil, water, air, habitats, and the people** who act as stewards of the land meaning we must consider **sustainability from social, environmental and economic perspectives**

- Education -

We must **passionately EDUCATE** ourselves with a growing base of diverse knowledges in order to have **meaningful impact** when we work to educate the public and government

Introduction

As OFT embarks on a new strategic plan, it is important to recall the legacy that has been developed by the Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT). A vision for OFT emerged at a forum hosted by the University of Guelph's Farmland Preservation Research Project and in 2004 the organization was established. Since that time, OFT has been the only provincial-wide land conservation organization dedicated to the protection of farmland in Ontario. OFT has successfully developed farmland conservation easements as a tool for protecting farmland and has successfully worked with farmers, government, and conservation partners to permanently protect farmland for agricultural and conservation purposes. OFT has developed a strong reputation for collaboration across sectors, providing sound policy advice and taking applied action to secure and protect farmland at risk. Our annual farmland forum is a hallmark of our education and community engagement activities that has an excellent reputation for providing informative sessions on timely matters related to farmland preservation.

The latest data from the 2021 Agricultural Census shows the rate of farmland loss in Ontario has nearly doubled since 2016 to a rate of 319 acres per day. This loss is unsustainable and is likely to continue to increase given other social and political factors. Ontario is experiencing an unprecedented urban-to-rural migration, an affordability housing and supply crisis, and increasing demand for aggregate operations to meet the demands for infrastructure development. As an agricultural land trust, OFT is uniquely positioned to contribute innovative solutions to these challenges that ensure we are achieving our mission.

The development of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan engaged a variety of stakeholders including members, landowners, volunteers, staff, and other supporters who echoed our legacy and strengths as an organization. Stakeholders also expressed the need to develop bold and innovative new approaches to OFT's farmland protection activities in order to make greater strides towards achieving our mission.

The priorities and goals within this plan were developed in order to apply OFT's strengths, permit new opportunities, broaden the organization's reach, and sustain the organization to support the implementation of long-term and effective strategies that will fulfill our mission and vision.

Many strengths and opportunities to achieve each priority were shared during the stakeholder engagement to exemplify how different activities could support our mission. To support future execution of the plan, this document highlights the strengths identified throughout the engagement process that corresponded with each priority.

This strategic plan outlines the priorities and corresponding goals to act as a guide for our activities for the next five years and showcases how OFT is ready to take bold and creative steps that will inspire hope and ignite people's desire to support our work. Given the complex and intersecting issues related to farmland loss, now is the time to set ambitious goals and targets to make a greater difference to protect our food-producing landscapes in Ontario.

Strategic Priorities

The overall goal of the priorities is to focus on improving the quality and reach of OFT's programs while enhancing our own understanding of our positionality as a land trust that enables us to address the various factors contributing to farmland loss in Ontario. By doing so, we will improve the outcomes of our programs, which will lead to greater achievement towards our mission and vision.

Program quality will be measured using various key performance indicators. Some of the indicators are expressed as goals as outlined under each priority, while others will be further developed as activities and programs evolve. Monitoring and evaluation activities will be key to the ongoing improvement of our programs, as described in Priority 5.

Summary of Priorities

1. Enhance the Farmland Protection Program by diversifying the tools and methods used to protect farmland
2. Enhance the Education and Community Engagement Program by diversifying our content and method of delivery
3. Increase the number of people and organizations that support OFT's activities
4. Increase annual revenue and improve financial stability
5. Improve organizational efficiency

Priority 1

Enhance the Farmland Protection Program by diversifying the tools and methods used to protect farmland

Goal 1.1 – Develop two additional versions of the farmland conservation easements, one that is intended for large-scale farm operations and one for small-scale farm operations, with the intention to be attractive for farmers, suitable for the diversification of on-farm enterprises, and flexible for changing agricultural practices

Goal 1.2 – 50% of newly secured easements are targeted properties that would contribute to the development of a cluster of protected areas of farmland

Goal 1.3 – Leverage existing stakeholder relations to secure a minimum of 5 referrals annually for OFT's Farmland Protection Program

Goal 1.4 – Develop a methodology for creating a version of an agricultural land preserve using OFT's farmland conservation easements and determine a high-priority area to target

Goal 1.5 – Increase the number of farms under OFT's protection by adding 40 new properties to our portfolio totalling an increase of 10,000 protected acres by 2029

Strengths to draw on:

- OFT's knowledge and unique expertise in farmland conservation easement agreements, including our ability to negotiate and steward Farmland Conservation Easement Agreements
- Ability to preserve farmland in perpetuity for future generations
- Our easements are seen as very strong
- Our work is seen as thorough
- Utilize our understanding of the changing landscape of farm businesses and land-use planning to develop easement content that supports the flexibility needed for on-farm diversified uses
- OFT's existing network and relationships with farmers can be leveraged to gather feedback on newly developed farmland conservation easement agreements

Priority 2

Enhance the Education and Community Engagement Program by diversifying our content and method of delivery

Goal 2.1 – Increase OFT’s newsletter reach, website traffic and social media followers by 15% year over year, while maintaining our engagement rates on our various platforms

Goal 2.2 – Develop educational resources that are designed to empower stronger farmland protection policies and practices at a local level, and have them accessed and utilized within 20 municipalities annually by building relationships within these communities and helping decision makers be better informed

Goal 2.3 – Develop inspiring and well-informed engagement and educational resources, such as fact sheets about farmland preservation and corresponding threats, and have these resources accessed from our website a total of 500 times per year

Goal 2.4 – Diversify methods of delivering educational content to ensure it reaches 1,000 people per year and that we capture a greater diversity of audience members in order to bring new concerned community members, their skills, networks, passions and energy into the organization, as well as empowering them to participate in farmland preservation work within their own communities

Goal 2.5 – Increase our media engagement with 10 annual radio or podcast shows and 12 annual media releases in order to reach new audiences and recruit followers

Goal 2.6 – OFT will continue to respond in a timely manner to changing provincial policy that directly affects farmland protection and preservation

Strengths to draw on:

- OFT’s expertise regarding effective farmland protection and our unique perspective that can help shape policy and programs that impact farmland and the agricultural system
- OFT has a good reputation for informing the public on credible farmland loss issues including food security, urban sprawl, aggregate operation, climate change and biodiversity, natural areas and ecosystem services, and the role farmers play as environmental stewards
- Ability to build relationships with government, both elected and staff
- Ability to deliver content at the Farmland Forum to a range of audience members from diverse fields and backgrounds
- Experience with virtual farmland forum will support the further development of educational material delivered online

Priority 3

Increase the number and diversity of people and organizations that support OFT's activities

Goal 3.1 – Increase and diversify¹ our membership base to a minimum of 100 members annually by 2024

Goal 3.2 – Target agricultural and community development not-for-profit organizations and businesses to develop strategic partnerships to aide in the delivery of each OFT program

Goal 3.3 – Develop a rewarding volunteer engagement program that recruits and mobilizes 50+ community members from across Ontario, empowering them to support and initiate farmland protection and preservation efforts in their region

Goal 3.4 – Acquire 50% of new donors through donor referrals by improving the brand recognition of the Friends of Farmland donor program so that each donor is empowered to promote their contributions to OFT and showcase the impact of their support (also see goal 4.5)

Strengths to draw on:

- Proven ability to work with other stakeholders from a variety of disciplines (agriculture, environmental, social advocacy, etc.)
- People-oriented approach to connecting with stakeholders
- Strong connections with other organizations
- Non-partisan, volunteer based, and non-governmental nature of the organization

¹ Diversify meaning: (i) more range in identities from a variety of demographic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds that will provide diverse perspectives on farmland loss issues, which will help prioritize OFT's annual activities and develop relevant educational content; (ii) a variety of farm producer-types including produce, livestock, field crops and other farm products, as well as conventional, ecological, and other production practices; (iii) more diversity of career-type members that can provide a range of understanding on the intersection of farmland protection and other agricultural-related industries and community development issues

Priority 4

Increase annual revenue and improve financial stability

Goal 4.1 – Secure annual sources of revenue totalling \$500,000 for the Land Protection Program and \$150,000 for the Education and Community Engagement Program

Goal 4.2 – Develop long-term, sustainable revenue generating activities that will contribute to 15% of the annual operating budget, while aiming to maintain a balance of ~28% of revenue from each of government grants, foundations, and donations

Goal 4.3 – Ensure the long-term financial sustainability of OFT's land stewardship and monitoring activities by growing the stewardship fund and using sound investment practices that will cover all monitoring expenses for the year

Goal 4.4 – Steward our current donor base to maintain an annual donor retention rate of 65%², a repeat donor renewal rate of 80%³, a monthly donor retention rate at 90%, a first-time donor conversion rate of 50%⁴, a donor renewal recovery rate of 20%⁵, and gift retention rate of 75%⁶

Goal 4.5 – Acquire 50 new donors annually, including individuals and organizations

Strengths to draw on:

- Good at being people-oriented, connecting with stakeholders
- Registered charitable organization (ability to provide tax receipts)
- Strong recurring donor base
- Mission people believe in

² Donor Retention Rate is the number of donors that are retained from one year to the next

³ Repeat Donor Renewal Rate is the number of donors that donated in this fiscal, the previous fiscal, plus at least one other fiscal (minimum of three gifts)

⁴ First Time Donor Conversion Rate is the number of first-time donors that donated in the previous fiscal and then donated again in the next fiscal

⁵ Donor Renewal Recovery Rate includes donors that did not donate in the previous fiscal, but who have donated in a past fiscal, and then again in the current fiscal

⁶ Gift retention rates refer to the amount donated by returning donors from one year to the next

Priority 5

Improve organizational efficiency

Goal 5.1 – Secure additional permanent staff that can provide in-house expertise needed to deliver on the various other goals, including the ability to respond to changing policy and other opportunities for program expansion

Goal 5.2 – Identify gaps in measuring key performance indicators for each priority and develop feedback and evaluation mechanisms for each programs' output

Goal 5.3 – Improve staff retention rate through competitive compensation packages that include permanent job placement, a benefits package, and resources for continuous skill development

Goal 5.4 – Invest in volunteer and board member training programs that develops leadership competencies and appropriate training opportunities

Goal 5.5 – Align annual budgets and program structures to ensure clear budgeting and accounting of activities for each program area

Goal 5.6 – Determine if there are opportunities to reduce unnecessary activities and costs while maintaining easement integrity

Strengths to draw on:

- Being adaptive
- Staff functions as a team, are capable and knowledgeable
- Data collection and management to support data-driven decision making
- Member of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance to support development of training opportunities, volunteer programs, and other program development opportunities