



Annual Report | **2024**

ONTARIO FARMLAND TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

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

Our vision at the Ontario Farmland Trust has always been 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 in Ontario. OFT has protected over 2,700 acres of land across 26 properties. We provide input on provincial land use planning policy, and spread awareness of the importance of farmland protection.

This Annual Report takes a look back at our 2024 activities and accomplishments.

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

Resource Development Manager

Joel Enman

Farmland Protection and Stewardship Program Manager

Teresa Trinh

Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator

Ben Tobias-Murray

Farmland Access and Agricultural Planning Coordinator

Board of Directors – 2024/2025

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Director, Chair of the Policy and Education Committee

Collette Aeschlimann**Krista Chapman****Judy Coward****Mike Douglas****Sara Epp****Peter Ghattas****Kalinga Jagota****Mark Reusser****Melanie Williams**

A Year in Review

As we reflect on 2024, we recognize that the threats to Ontario's farmland remain both urgent and deeply complex. Urban expansion, land speculation, demand for aggregate, and an aging farming population continue to put pressure on our most productive farmland. Yet, amidst these challenges, the Ontario Farmland Trust has made powerful strides expanding our impact, deepening our partnerships, and growing a movement rooted in farmland protection.

In 2024, we celebrated 20 years of the Ontario Farmland Trust. This milestone is one that not only honours our past achievements, but also launches a bold vision for our future. As part of this momentum, we launched our ambitious strategic plan aimed at accelerating our conservation efforts, supporting organizational growth, and launching new and innovative programming, including leveraging OFT-owned farmland to provide land access for the next generation of farmers.

We protected a new farm in Durham Region, began work to protect five additional farms, and advanced our work in developing regional clusters of protected farmland. These collective efforts bring us closer to our goal of protecting 40 new properties by 2029.

Our work expanded beyond the fields, too. We piloted Planning for Agricultural Conservation, a new graduate course that is now a formal part of the Rural Planning and Development program. With this, we're equipping future planners with the tools to champion farmland protection across the province.

The past year also marked record levels of community engagement. Our Farmland Forum welcomed the largest audience in OFT history, our volunteer program blossomed with nearly 40 active volunteers, and we reached over 1,100 Ontarians through events, webinars, and outreach. In the policy sphere, we participated in strategic discussions with governments and other organizations to advocate for stronger land-use planning protections.

As we look ahead, we are energized by the momentum and deeply grateful for the community that fuels this work. Whether it's donors, volunteers, landowners, or allies in policy and planning, your support is what enables OFT to be bold, innovative, and responsive to the needs of our agricultural systems.

Together, we are securing not only farmland. We are also preserving possibility, prosperity, and the promise of Ontario's farmland for generations to come.

Thank you for standing with us in this vital work.



Martin Straathof
Executive Director



Margaret Walton
Board Chair



2024 Achievements



Launched our
1st
'Flavours of Farmland'
educational campaign



30+
articles in
the media featuring
OFT. Plus 4 features via
radio and podcast.



Welcomed
226
new subscribers to
our e-newsletter
list



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



Received
26
landowner inquiries
about protecting their
farmland



Engaged with over
1,700
people across
Ontario

Education & Outreach

2024 Farmland Forum

Since its conception, the forum has been a pivotal gathering for exploring innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges of farmland preservation in Ontario. The 2024 Farmland Forum, themed “The Future of Ontario Farmland”, celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Ontario Farmland Trust. With the largest turnout in OFT history, the forum welcomed 135 attendees in person and 120 attendees online.



Keynote speakers included Becky Big Canoe, Chair and Co-founder of Mno Aki Land Trust, and Richard Bloomfield, PhD Candidate at the University of Western. Two panels were held, exploring topics: *Farmland Protection & Environmental Policy: Planning for the Future*, and *Who Will Farm it? Supporting Farm & Foodland Access in Ontario*. Presentations from students of OFT's joint course with the University of Guelph's Rural Planning and Development (RPD) master's program featured their final projects on farmland preserves and municipality capacity toolkits. The day was invigorated with insights and discussions centering on necessary policy reforms and strategic approaches to preserve Ontario's agricultural lands, heritage, and property for future generations to come.

Thank you to each sponsor, speaker, and volunteer for making this event such a success!

Educational Workshops

OFT's Winter Webinar series continued to engage and inspire our audiences in 2024 with topics highlighting farmland protection and stewardship. Attendance to all sessions was high, with attendees participating via insightful questions and discussions throughout all topics. Webinars are available online to view on our YouTube channel (@ontariofarmlandtrust9127).

Jan 2024: *Land Access Programs*

Aug 2024: *Farmland Protection & Affordable Housing: A Path Forward*

Oct 2024: *Farmland Protection Options with OFT*

Dec 2024: *Species at Risk on Farms*



Stay tuned for our next webinar series launching Fall 2025.



Community Outreach

In 2024, we hosted a table at nine events across Ontario, speaking to over 750 concerned and interested community members and farmers about farmland protection and provincial policy changes.

Events included:

- East Central Farm Show
- London Farm Show
- Wellington Farmers Market
- Kingston Memorial Centre Farmers Market
- Canada's Outdoor Farm Show
- Toronto Patagonia Store
- Barrie Farmers Market
- Moondance Organics Farm
- International Plowing Match



Canada's Outdoor Farm Show

We attended the farm show for the fourth year in a row, with 135 conversations among farmers, industry representatives, and community members. Participation at this event helps to position OFT as a dedicated member of the agricultural community.

Volunteer Program

This past year, OFT experienced a full year of our newly relaunched volunteer program. An amazing 39 volunteers contributed 1,712 hours to OFT. This includes in areas of Community Engagement, Communications, Farmland Monitoring, Policy Research, and on our Board of Directors and Committees. We extend a hearty THANK YOU to our many volunteers, as OFT could not have made the strides we did in 2024 without you!





Farmland Policy and Planning Education

In 2024, OFT proudly piloted *Planning for Agricultural Conservation*, a graduate-level course developed in collaboration with the University of Guelph's Rural Planning and Development (RPD) program. With funding graciously provided by the OAC Alumni Foundation, this course was a first-of-its-kind offering dedicated entirely to farmland protection policy and planning.

Delivered by OFT Executive Director Martin Straathof, and Dr. Sara Epp, Associate Professor in RPD, the course provided 12 students with a comprehensive look at agricultural land-use planning, food systems, and farmland protection strategies. Featuring six guest speakers including farmers, planners, and leaders behind the creation of Rouge National Urban Park, the course emphasized experiential learning, group collaboration, and applied research.

Student projects culminated in the development of two practical toolkits now available for municipalities, helping to bridge the gap between academic research and on-the-ground planning needs. These student-led projects were also presented at OFT's 2024 Farmland Forum, offering valuable insights to over 250 attendees and fostering policy dialogue on land use and farmland access.

Thanks to its success and positive student feedback, *Planning for Agricultural Conservation* is now an integrated elective in the RPD program. We look forward to further developing the course to include field-based learning on preserved farmland and student-led guidebooks to improve public engagement on agricultural land use planning.

By equipping the next generation of rural planners with the tools to advocate for farmland, OFT is helping to build long-term capacity in the fight to protect Ontario's agricultural future.

Thank You

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

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Plus 9 anonymous

In Honour

Jennifer Ackerman
Kathryn Gold's birthday
Helma Geerts
Paul and Elsie Paley
Luca's Educators at Queen of Heaven

In Memoriam

Doris Douglas
Margaret Loft Hayter
Robert Edward Miller
Wnona Mulligan
Andreas Pfenning
Douglas K. Redner
Philip Robinson
Carl Stewart



Our Newest Protected Property

Stevens Farm

Acres: Phase 1 - 28.79 acres of a 164-acre farm

Area: Durham Region

The Stevens property, also known as Wilmot Orchards, grows 11 different types of blueberries along with a variety of apples on entirely Class 1 soil. This sixth-generation farm began in 1976 and has since transformed from a dairy farm into a staple for community members to gather, pick their blueberries, and enjoy the farm’s cafe. Every summer, the farm draws in 20,000 to 30,000 visitors to bask in its abundance.

As the first farmland owners in Durham Region to protect their farm with a farmland conservation easement, they hope to inspire other farmers in the region, and beyond, to ensure that more farms stay in agricultural production for generations to come.



Species Spotlight: Yellow-banded Bumble Bee



Ontario hosts 16 bumble bee species, four of which are at risk—including the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee, now provincially listed as a species of special concern. This year, it was spotted for the first time on an Ontario Farmland Trust protected property.

Identified by its yellow and black bands and short tongue, it often accesses nectar through holes at the base of flowers. It’s a key pollinator for native plants and crops including apples, potatoes, blueberries, cranberries and alfalfa.

Healthy colonies rely on diverse plant species and connected habitats of forested areas, native grasslands, and farmland to avoid fragmentation and loss of genetic diversity.



The Ontario Farmland Trust celebrated the protection of its 24th farm with a gathering on September 15, 2024. The 38 hectare (94 acres) Hazell and Klaassen Farm, in the heart of Prince Edward County (PEC), is known locally as Stonefield Eden Alpacas. The couple have been raising alpacas on this land, although it has previously been planted to winter wheat, beans, peas, and corn.

The celebration included remarks from the landowner, Dee Hazell, and OFT Executive Director, Martin Straathof, as well as a farm tour of the beautiful property. In addition to the agricultural land, the farm also hosts a hardwood forest, wetlands and streams, North Bay coastline, and trees that are over 100 years old. The natural areas are home to a variety of wildlife, including several species at risk, like the Barn Swallow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Midland Painted Turtle, and Monarch Butterfly.



Species Spotlight: Wood Thrush

Wood Thrushes are medium-sized songbirds with round white bellies marked by rusty brown spots. Males are known for their flutelike songs, often heard before the birds are seen.

They nest in saplings of sugar maple and American beech and are found in mature deciduous and mixed forests. These habitats are often found on Ontario farms, and are critical for breeding. However, habitat loss and fragmentation from development threaten their survival.

Wood Thrushes are fall migrants, overwintering in Mexico and Central America. They are provincially listed as a species of special concern and have been observed on three Ontario Farmland Trust protected properties, and one pending protection.

Farmland Protection

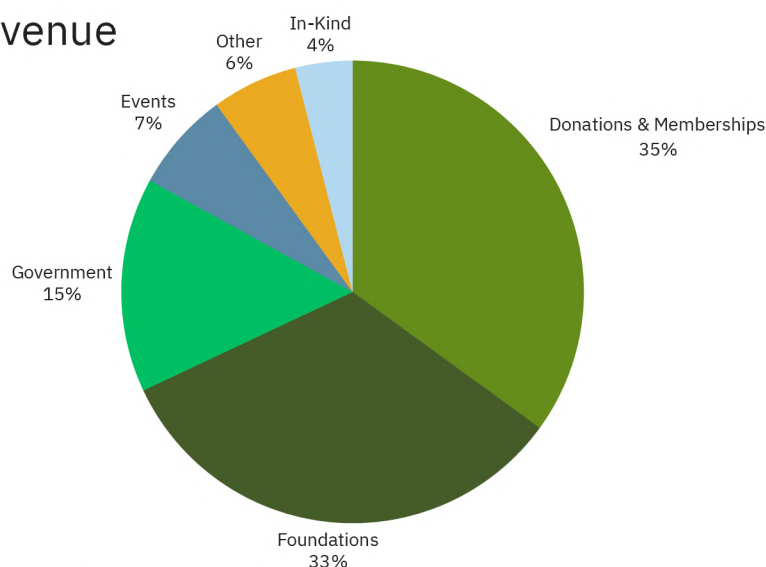


Financials 2024

	Audited 2024	Audited 2023
Revenue	\$625,197*	\$394,259*
Expenses	\$550,896	\$371,067
Excess (Deficiency)	\$74,301	\$23,192

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

Revenue



Collaborations & Partnerships

Partnerships are essential to the success of the Ontario. This year saw many new collaborations leading to partnerships for OFT!

- We worked alongside the Centre for Land Conservation to achieve Conservation Excellence Certification
- We successfully proposed a project to develop a future vision for the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve with the Greenbelt Foundation
- We raised a record amount of revenue through an increased effort to reach out to new funders of all types, in particular with private foundations and government funding programs
- ...and many more!

We are eager to keep up this momentum of building relationships across Ontario for the future of farmland. Contact us at info@ontariofarmlandtrust.ca if you have an idea for partnership!

What's on the Horizon?

Already in 2025, we have started another six Conservation Easement Agreement projects - one each in Simcoe County, Waterloo Region, and Peel Region, and three in Eastern Ontario - moving us closer toward our goal of 40 projects by 2029!

We're also excited to begin developing a future vision for the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve (DRAP) - Ontario's only designated agricultural preserve. With support from the Greenbelt Foundation, we're developing a long-term plan to protect this vital farmland and engage farmers and communities in shaping its future. This will be a model for what's possible when agricultural land protection is prioritized.

Recently, we received a transformational \$1 million gift to accelerate our work over the next three years! This funding will help us to hire regionally-based conservation coordinators, respond to over 70 interested landowners, deepen community partnerships, and support our rapid growth as we protect more farmland than ever before.

We're also expanding in Prince Edward County, where rapid farmland loss is a growing concern. In partnership with the Centre for Land Conservation and with support from the Consecon and Woodcock Foundations, we're launching a focused conservation strategy to engage PEC communities and create a shared plan for preserving this critical agricultural landscape.

The growth we are experiencing is not by chance. It is the result of years of dedicated effort by folks who came before, as well as our current team of staff and volunteers, and of the time spent on strategic planning.

Share the mission

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!





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Ontario Farmland Trust

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