



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES • SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

June 29, 2017

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
Attention: Karla Uliana  
1 Stone Road West  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Guelph, ON N1G 4Y2

**Subject: Farms Forever Discussion Paper**

Dear Ms. Uliana,

The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is pleased to provide comments on the Farms Forever Discussion Paper recently released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). As a stakeholder in agriculture and agri-food, OPPI would like to thank the Ministry for the opportunity to provide comments on the Discussion Paper that has the broad aim of strengthening the province's agri-food sector into the future.

OPPI is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession. Our almost 4,500 members from across Ontario work in government, private practice, universities, and not-for-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, community design, environmental planning, transportation, health, social services, heritage conservation, housing, agriculture, agri-food and economic development. Members meet quality practice requirements and are accountable to OPPI and the public to practice ethically and to abide by a Professional Code of Practice. Only Full Members are authorized by the Ontario Professional Planners Institute Act, 1994, to use the title "Registered Professional Planner" (RPP).

The following are comments for consideration:

**Policy Objective 1: Preserving the Productive Capacity of Agricultural Land Close to Major Urban Centres**

- There is a strong emphasis in the Discussion Paper on development pressure and encroachment into agricultural land in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) area. There is a need to recognize that development pressures are also a concern for rural communities throughout Ontario, many of whom rely on agriculture to support their local economies. Rural communities also face urban expansion due to the lower land costs.

The protections put in place for prime agricultural lands within the GGH put further pressures on lands outside of these areas particularly those for which agriculture is a primary economic and employment source. The Discussion Paper is silent in regards to necessity of protecting prime agricultural lands outside of already regulated lands within the GGH. Protection of prime agricultural lands should continue across the entire province, recognizing that there needs to be some flexibility for appropriate development in rural municipalities.

- One of the issues here and elsewhere in Canada is that average farm size has increased, the number of farms have decreased, and the average age of the farm operator has increased. The focus should shift to farm size and further discussions are needed on this topic. The question is whether farmland can be protected throughout Ontario while still achieving an increase in the number of farms on protected land.
- On the topic of how can knowledge in soil health research and water and soil stewardship best be translated to farmers and on the ground professionals, consideration could be given to incentives for completing training/education or stewardship projects. There could also be partnerships within the industry at existing events such as the Outdoor Farm Show.

## **Policy Objective 2: Supporting Local Food**

- There is no discussion in this Section on Supporting Local Food regarding the health benefits. There is a need to acknowledge the link between supporting local food and its contribution towards improving food security and improving healthy eating behaviours. Food insecurity is particularly a concern for smaller, rural communities where there may be limited opportunities to access foods through retail stores. The effects of food insecurity impacts population health and social cohesion.
- On the topic of how government and its partners can better support the production and supply of local food, the Provincial Policy Statement and many Official Plans do a good job of planning for commercial scale agriculture, but consideration needs to be given to farm lot size to support the growing of local food/niche products on smaller acreages.
- In support of consumer awareness and demand, the Province could assist in the creation of ‘appellations’ for food provenance similar to wine and some European products and co-market it with Foodland Ontario, in addition to YouTube information videos, signage and increased scale of labelling in stores.
- Possibilities should be considered to support local food by providing funding for the creation of local food kitchens that can process small batches of local food and review of regulations for commercial kitchens for small batch processing and products sold only from farm gate. Health Units could be a potential partner. Another idea for consideration is raising the per day food allowance for residents in public facilities to allow the sourcing and purchasing of local food.

### **Policy Objective 3: Strengthening Ontario's Agri-food Sector**

- The rising costs of electricity is creating a barrier for the greenhouse industry to operate and expand. In southwest Ontario, several greenhouse operations have opened new locations in the United States where costs are cheaper. There is a need to acknowledge the greenhouse industry in this paper.
- There is a trend in some rural communities to have commercial greenhouse vegetable production on vacant industrial lands. Guidance is needed from OMAFRA to assist municipalities during the development review process. Guidelines, standards or policies are needed to help municipalities address environmental safety, siting considerations, and property standards.
- There is a lack of financial incentives for start-up operations in the agricultural industry. The Province has provided millions to the auto industry and may consider refocusing its priorities on enabling food production in Ontario and create the conditions under which the agri-food sector can prosper.
- There is a need to ensure Ontario/Canadian quality control mechanisms are properly funded; push the clean environment (air/water/soil) marketing angle to foreign buyers; and include small farmer operations on foreign marketing trips to realize opportunities.
- There should be encouragement and support more co-operation between individual farmers in order to build sufficient product volume to gain interest in larger markets e.g. major food suppliers.

### **Policy Objective 4: Support for New and Beginning Farmers**

- Measures are needed to help new farm families enter the agricultural sector. The rising costs of land, largely due to speculation, creates challenges for new farmers to enter the market. The Ministry should address the commercialization of agricultural operations by creating space for the new farmer, creating room where marketing agricultural commodities governed by marketing boards limit their access. We need to create space for new farmers to bulk up their businesses to the point where they can compete. That would also include mechanisms where land can be purchased and made available to new farmers perhaps to farm with a different ownership structure (e.g. as condominiums or some such method) as well as providing access to local markets through grocery stores etc., mobile slaughter facilities; and other services farmers whose farms are smaller need to round out their operations. In a sense we need to recreate the communities that support local production by providing the access to land, services and markets which through commercialization favour large commercial corporate agricultural operations.
- A discussion is needed regarding farm parcel size. Larger lot sizes are costly and make it difficult for new entrants. Further discussion is needed to explore opportunities where smaller lot sizes can be permitted while still ensuring the land remains in agricultural production.

- There is a need to incentivize young farmers to enter the market. Incentive programs should be explored at the post-secondary level. The Discussion Paper currently focuses on skills building and training in post-secondary institutions and associated partnerships to facilitate skills development. There is, however, also a need to incorporate incentives that could include other partners, for instance in science and technology, to make it financially feasible for students to enter the market. An approach could be taken for agri-food careers in a manner similar to the way trades are being promoted.

**General Comments:**

- There is a need to address the role of the agricultural sector in addressing climate change. A discussion would be beneficial regarding supports for the agricultural sector to reduce emissions. There is also a need to create opportunities for the agricultural sector to improve energy efficient operations. There is an opportunity for OMAFRA to incubate new and innovative practices and to help farmers adapt to new technologies.
- The Discussion Paper does not include direction on monitoring of implementation measures and timeframe for actions.

OPPI would like to thank the Ministry for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions, please contact me at 416-668-8469 or by email at [l.ryan@ontarioplanners.ca](mailto:l.ryan@ontarioplanners.ca)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ryan', followed by a horizontal line.

Loretta Ryan, RPP, CAE  
Director, Public Affairs  
Ontario Professional Planners Institute