

# FROM THE FIELD

From our field office to yours – timely information for MPPs about Ontario's agri-food sector, from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture



Keith Currie  
President  
Ontario Federation  
of Agriculture

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

With harvest wrapping up across most of Ontario, farmers are turning their thoughts to assessing the year's performance and using that information to begin making plans for the next growing season. There are a number of issues impacting how well our farm businesses fared this year – from the unpredictability of the weather and markets, to the uncertainty of changing legislation and regulatory factors.

Minimum wage changes are on the minds of many of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's (OFA) members, and the impact of steep and sudden increases will have on farm businesses. Federal tax changes have been in the news and on our minds too. There are some encouraging developments based on the pressure put on the government by groups including OFA, and we continue to watch this area closely.

This issue of *From the Field* features OFA's key messages for the 2018 provincial election that we're covering under the theme of **Producing Prosperity for Ontario**. We're framing our election messaging around the idea of distributing economic development across the province. Rural Ontario has tremendous capacity and opportunity to support economic development, and reduce the pressure on our urban centres. You'll be hearing more from us on this front in the coming months.

Now that most of the fall colours are gone, and winter is headed our way, agriculture heads indoors to some key events in the winter months. The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair features the best of the agri-food industry every November in Toronto. And we'd love to see you at OFA's annual meeting in Toronto in late November. See page four for location for dates and details.



## MOBILIZING OUR VOICES ON TAX

When the federal government announced its proposed tax changes in July, OFA quickly set up a way for its members to share their concerns about the devastating impact the changes would have on farm families and small rural businesses. We created a website for OFA members to voice their concerns directly to their local MPs. And the response was overwhelming. More than 750 letters were sent to Finance Minister Morneau.

OFA is very encouraged by the statements made in late October to reduce the small business tax. This reduction will definitely help drive growth in the agriculture sector, and boost the overall competitiveness of Canadian farmers.

### More than 750 Ontario farmers voiced their concerns through OFA about the proposed federal tax changes.

Other changes appear to indicate that the voice of farmers and farm groups have been heard – including the removal of all capital gains rules and keeping all existing family farm transfer rules.

These announcements to tax changes will also have important, positive implications for rural small businesses that support our agriculture industry.

Inside...

**Producing Prosperity  
for Ontario**

**Growth Beyond Cities**

**Queen's Park Day highlights**

# WE'RE PRODUCING PROSPERITY FOR ONTARIO

OFA is focusing our spring 2018 election messaging around the theme of *Producing Prosperity for Ontario*. We believe Ontario can do better for all its citizens by distributing the economic growth and development across the province. There are a few key urban centres – Toronto, Ottawa and London – that are experiencing high rates of

growth in population and economic activity. And yet, our rural areas and small communities are seeing declines in population and economic output.

The concept of *Producing Prosperity for Ontario* creates growth opportunities for rural farms and businesses, while alleviating some of the challenges facing our growing urban centres.

## *New policy paper supports growth beyond cities*

*A recent paper commissioned and published by the Rural Ontario Institute supports the need for policies that will foster growth and development in Ontario's rural communities. **Growth Beyond Cities: Place-Based Rural Development Policy in Ontario** was written by agricultural economist David Freshwater. He notes that Ontario has become a highly urbanized province over the last 50 years, and despite the significant rural population, provincial policies are mostly urban oriented. He also cites that policies designed to improve the economy of rural areas will have beneficial impacts at the provincial level.*

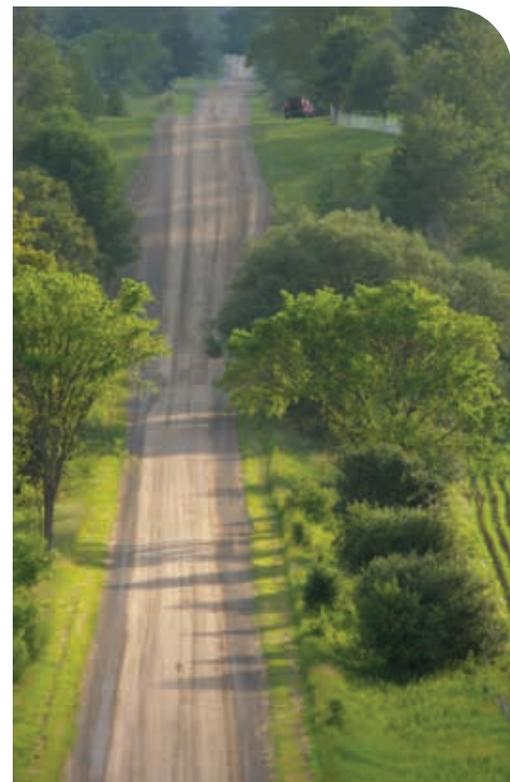
*Read the full paper at [ruralontarioinstitute.ca/foresightpapers](http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/foresightpapers)*

### RURAL CHALLENGES

- ✓ services and infrastructure are not up to par
- ✓ reliable labour is hard to find
- ✓ property taxes are rising
- ✓ schools are closing and children are being bussed longer distances
- ✓ few opportunities for youth to remain in their communities

### URBAN CHALLENGES

- ✓ traffic congestion
- ✓ higher rates of poverty
- ✓ long commutes, higher carbon emissions
- ✓ ongoing housing crisis with 400,000 new residents expected in GTA in next 10 years
- ✓ accelerating costs for infrastructure that can't keep pace with population growth



# Food Literacy Baseline Survey Results

OFA, together with an advisory committee, surveyed three distinct consumer groups to measure their level of food literacy. We wanted to know what the attitude and awareness was around food with parents with kids at home, teenagers and early millennials.

The Food Literacy Attitude and Awareness Research Project is the first step in establishing a baseline level of food literacy knowledge and understanding among Ontario consumers.

The online survey reached just over 1,000 consumers across Ontario, and here's a sneak peek at what we found.

- ✓ Only 25% of respondents accessed Canada's Food Guide last year
- ✓ Nearly 25% of respondents knew none of the food groups
- ✓ Millennials seek health and nutrition info from a wider variety of sources, compared to other groups
- ✓ Overall, there is a clear understanding of local food, but not food production systems
- ✓ Local food knowledge was not dependent on where the consumer lived (rural, urban, suburban)

The full report will be released November 27 and will be available at [ofa.on.ca](http://ofa.on.ca).

OFA, along with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, have identified food literacy as an important component of the National Food Strategy. OFA developed its unique Six by Sixteen program ([SixbySixteen.me](http://SixbySixteen.me)) as a resource for parents, teachers, teens and health professionals to promote a better understanding of food preparation and nutrition.



OFA has identified five net effects of distributing economic activity across the province. We look forward to talking to you about our ideas for *Producing Prosperity for Ontario*.

## 1 Economic growth

Strategic investments in infrastructure with spark investments in rural Ontario communities.

## 2 Job creation

New investments in rural areas will create new small- and medium-size enterprises, jobs and new opportunities for families and youth.

## 3 Affordable housing

When we improve the economic activity and jobs, more Ontarians will be able to find work in smaller and mid-sized communities across the province. These communities will become more attractive for the lifestyle and affordable home ownership opportunities.

Look to rural Ontario for long-term, effective public policy to improve incomes and quality of life across Ontario. Let's work together to produce prosperity for all Ontarians.

## 4 Food safety

When we support a strong domestic agri-food industry, and invest in infrastructure that promotes activity across the province, all Ontarians will have access to the highest quality food that is safe and locally grown.

## 5 Environmental stewardship

Farm businesses are stewards of the earth, and have a long history of conserving land and preserving soil. Sound public policy that creates economic opportunities can be paired with thoughtful land-use policy to ensure our vital resources remain protected for future generations.





## MPP Fall Lobby Day

OFA directors took part in our annual lobby day at Queen's Park on October 3. We welcome the continued opportunity to meet with MPPs throughout the day, discussing issues and priorities that impact our 37,000 farm members as part of Ontario's dynamic agri-food sector. Coinciding with Ontario Agriculture Week provided the perfect pairing opportunity with locally-grown and produced food and beverages.

We introduced our *Producing Prosperity for Ontario* theme – highlighting the need for distributing economic development across the province so farmers and rural communities can better contribute to a growing and vital rural and urban economy.

OFA President Keith Currie reminded MPPs about the economic powerhouse that is our agri-food sector, and the importance of supporting and sustaining it through effective legislation. He was joined by Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, MPP John Vanthof, NDP Ag Critic and MPP Ernie Hardeman, PC Municipal Affairs and Housing Critic.

Thank you to all those who attended OFA's MPP reception – we always appreciate the opportunity to talk about our industry.

## Bringing Ontario's farm voice

When you represent an organization with 37,000 members, you need to several different ways to gather input, provide updates and keep in touch with everyone. OFA is the largest farm organization in the province, and we are responsible for and to all of our farm members across the province. And while we are all farmers, we are a diverse group that produces more than 200 different products grown in Ontario.

OFA's role is to represent and advocate the shared interests and concerns of our membership, with government and policymakers. Here's how we tackle the task.

- ✓ **field staff:** a knowledgeable team of 21 field staff (we call them Member Service Representatives) who are the on-the-ground face of OFA with farm members across the province
- ✓ **researchers:** a team of 7 skilled policy staff to keep on top of regulatory and legislative matters
- ✓ **surveys:** regular member surveys to gather input, feedback and impact on issues and policies
- ✓ **collaboration:** with 31 other organizations that represent Ontario agri-food commodities

When you hear from OFA, you are hearing the voices of 37,000 Ontario farmers.

## COMING EVENTS

Agriculture heads to the city for two big events in November – the Royal and OFA's annual meeting.



**Royal Agricultural Winter Fair**  
Exhibition Place – Toronto  
November 3-12, 2017  
[www.royalfair.org](http://www.royalfair.org)



**OFA's Annual Meeting**  
Delta Hotels by Marriott  
Toronto Airport & Conference Centre  
655 Dixon Road – Toronto  
November 20-21, 2017  
[www.ofa.on.ca](http://www.ofa.on.ca)

Do you have questions about Ontario's agri-food sector or want to learn more about issues impacting our industry? Contact OFA for insight and information.

**Keith Currie, President**  
Ontario Federation of Agriculture  
705.441.3362

**Neil Currie, General Manager**  
Ontario Federation of Agriculture  
519.821.8883