

OFAtoday

2017 Edition

Annual Update from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture

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FARMS AND FOOD FOREVER**

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Suite 206
100 Stone Road West
Guelph, ON N1G 5L3
519-821-8883
1-800-668-3276
ofa.on.ca

EDITOR

Tyler Brooks

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Jason Bent
Tyler Brooks
Danielle Collins
Neil Currie
Peter Jeffery
Ben LeFort

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Tyler Brooks
Neil Tarlton

OFA Today is published for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), the largest general farm organization in Ontario, representing 36,000 farm families. As a dynamic, farmer-led organization based in Guelph, OFA works to represent and champion the interests of Ontario farmers through government relations, farm policy recommendations, lobby efforts, research, community representation, media relations and more. OFA is the leading advocate for Ontario's farmers and is Ontario's voice of the farmer.

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LAYOUT & DESIGN

Shaun Clark
Tanya Myers

ADVERTISING SALES

Glenn Ruegg
glenn.ruegg@betterfarming.com
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Tyler Brooks
Ontario Federation
of Agriculture

Editor's Note

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is proud to share with you our latest issue of *OFA Today*. Inside this year's annual publication, we feature a recap of our 80th anniversary celebrations, key issues impacting Ontario farmers and a look ahead to our plans and objectives for 2017.

We begin our 81st year of farm advocacy with a new mission for OFA –

Farms and Food Forever. The mission reflects our new approach to advocating and serving Ontario farmers. As a farmer-led organization we value the input and feedback from our 36,000 farm families.

OFA Today continues to serve as a valuable tool for communicating with our membership. We provide an informative update and summary on the diverse issues and activities OFA has been working on over the last year.

On these pages you'll read about OFA's partnership with Hydro One on mitigating on-farm electrical issues, farm property assessment information, OFA's new online resource helping members find products and services for their farm business, a guide for municipalities to help support agricultural growth and highlights from our 2016 advocacy activities.

In fall 2016, OFA partnered with the Eastern Ontario and Western Ontario Wardens' Caucuses to strengthen our push to secure natural gas access across Ontario to build stronger rural communities. Read about OFA's actions on securing affordable, accessible energy.

As we embark on a new year, OFA's work continues to service and support the members and supporters our organization represents. We continue our engagement in several government consultations and legislative reviews including the four provincial land use plans, *Conservation Authorities Act*, Ontario's Long-Term Energy Plan, *Invasive Species Act* and the *Waste-Free Ontario Act*.

We hope you take the time to read this publication and find it a valuable resource for updates and information on OFA's activities.

We thank you, our OFA members, for your ongoing support as we work together to achieve the policies, practices and regulations that will enable us to grow farms and food forever. We look forward to a new year of growth and opportunities for Ontario's #1 economic driver.

Sincerely,



Tyler Brooks



Keith Currie, President
Ontario Federation of Agriculture

President's Welcome

Welcome to the 2017 edition of *OFA Today*. It is my honour to have been elected to serve as your President for 2016/2017. The year ahead, much like the year behind us, will be one filled with challenges and opportunities for OFA. We will continue to do the

work to ensure that you, our members, are provided with the tools and support you require to continue to successfully run your farm businesses in a sustainable and profitable manner.

Through the work of your board of directors and its executive committee, the Policy Advisory Council and county federations, OFA has been and will continue to work on behalf of farmers in Ontario to ensure that your needs and goals are put in front of all stakeholders. From the municipal level up to the federal level, OFA advocates to ensure the work you do on your farm can be done efficiently with the least amount of regulatory impact. And through our affiliation with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the work continues on both a national and global level.

OFA's mission statement, **Farms and Food Forever**, is a reflection of the goals of the organization going forward to protect our farms and our food forever. With this new direction, OFA will continue to be your voice.

Several issues top our work plan this year. Energy in general has been a topic on everyone's mind for the past year and will continue to dominate our agenda in 2017. High electricity prices are putting many of our members in positions of reconsidering their operations – from how they currently operate to whether they expand or not, to even contemplating exiting the industry. Energy is something OFA will continue to address with the provincial government to ensure our members are not put at competitive

disadvantages or at risk of not being profitable. Our continued push for natural gas expansion throughout Ontario will certainly help alleviate long-term energy costs. Our partnership with both the Eastern and Western Wardens' Caucuses ensures all of rural Ontario has joined in the fight for natural gas. The other pillar under hydro that OFA has seen progress on is stray voltage. Working with all our partners, we made huge steps in tackling an issue that has haunted livestock producers for years, and we will continue to push for changes to our monitoring and delivery of electricity until this problem is resolved.

Other issues that dominate our agenda include our continued work on reducing phosphorous levels in Lake Erie, rural economic development, land use planning, the protection of rural Ontario's social infrastructure by advocating against rural school and community hub closures, workplace safety and property tax assessment controls.

Collectively, these issues relate to public trust, a subject now engrained in everything we do. Farmers are trusted by society. We need to continue to do our work in the same responsible and transparent manner we always have.

Again, it is my pleasure to represent 36,000 OFA members to help bring you the tools you need to be profitable and sustainable. On behalf of our board and the entire organization, thank you for the work you do to provide Ontario and the world with healthy food, fibre, fuel, jobs and overall prosperity.

Thank you,



Keith Currie
President

Grow Rural Ontario

Rural Ontario is faced with soaring energy costs that are stifling growth. Energy is one of the largest inputs on farms – with few alternatives – and adding up to a significant cost to rural residents and local business owners.

That's why competitive energy is a priority for OFA. We need a commitment from our government for a real investment in reasonably priced, accessible and reliable energy sources. Rural Ontario needs affordable energy.

OFA pushes for natural gas

Farmers, businesses and residents are faced with soaring costs of energy – mostly the cost of electricity. Affordable natural gas is the single most important investment that will give farms, businesses and rural residents the competitive edge to drive growth.

In fall 2016, the provincial government's throne speech included a commitment to growth and infrastructure improvements. OFA is holding the government to that promise, and pressing the need for affordable energy in the form of natural gas to drive growth.

Natural gas is a clean, affordable energy source that is readily available in urban Ontario. It's time for a real investment in competitive energy to help rural Ontario grow. That's why OFA launched our natural gas campaign at ontarioruralgrowth.ca. The site outlines the opportunities that natural gas will bring to farm businesses and rural communities.

Partnering for success

In the push to expand natural gas access across rural Ontario, OFA partnered with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus and the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus in October 2016. The partnership was announced at Queen's Park and work is underway with the provincial government and gas companies to secure a fair and equitable way to install new natural gas pipeline across rural Ontario each year for the next 20 years.

The program to install pipeline across Ontario, proposed by OFA and partners, will require public investment in the pipeline infrastructure and a viable rural rate for gas set by the Ontario Energy Board. Working together, the group is strengthening the call for a commitment to natural gas across Ontario.

Left to right: Randy Hope (Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus), Don McCabe (OFA), Peter Emon (Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus)



Why Ontario agriculture needs a Long-Term Energy Plan

The Ontario government held a consultation process in fall 2016 to develop the next Long-Term Energy Plan for Ontario. The plan will outline a path for maintaining a reliable supply of clean, affordable energy. Ontario farm businesses depend on affordable energy to grow our farms, businesses, communities and the Ontario economy, that's why OFA is so invested in ensuring an energy plan includes the needs of our members.

OFA's official submission to the province's Long-Term Energy Plan focused on three key priorities.

1. Rural Ontario needs access to natural gas and renewable natural gas systems to reduce energy costs and help stimulate the rural economy.
2. Rural Ontario needs a combination of fuel solutions to meet rural needs and address climate change.

3. Rural Ontario needs effective smart metering and smart grid technology to manage energy generation, distribution and load use.

A responsive, reliable grid with access to safe, affordable energy will help sustain and expand Ontario's agri-food sector. OFA is asking the Ontario government for a strong rural focus in the next Long-Term Energy Plan, balanced with reliability, conservation and community considerations that will benefit all Ontarians.



Would your farm business benefit from natural gas access?

77% YES 23% NO

OFA online poll survey —October 2016



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2016 Government Advocacy Activities

OFA is rooted in a strong history of advocacy. Our team of staff, elected representatives and volunteers are engaged daily with government personnel, reviewing policies, attending consultations and addressing concerns on behalf of our members.

Business is conducted in a variety of places – boardrooms, Queen's Park, on the farm and in the field.

In 2016, OFA staff responded to 130 Environment Bill of Rights listings, submitting 50 responses to government.

Staff, elected representatives and volunteers made regular committee appearances, met with Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP), government committees and policy decision makers.

OFA also hosts events throughout the year to engage MPPs and their staff, educating them about Ontario agriculture and issues facing members. In 2016, OFA hosted three caucus breakfast events at Queen's Park in the spring and a lobby day in the fall. OFA also attended Foodland Ontario's Farmers' Market in June. All Queen's Park events were well attended and provided the opportunity to start important discussions and continue consultations to make progress on issues impacting Ontario agriculture.

The 2016 annual MPP Field Day was hosted at King Cole Ducks in Newmarket, ON. Inviting MPPs, their staff and policy makers out to experience Ontario farms is a priority for OFA. Field Day attendees experienced a progressive, vertically integrated duck farm. Government attendees enjoyed

their farm experience, learning and experiencing firsthand what it takes to operate a farm business in Ontario. The event provided OFA with an opportunity to meet with MPPs during the summer break and gear up for getting back to business in the fall.

OFA continues to review and respond to policies impacting farm businesses. Regular consultations with Policy Advisory Council (PAC) members, input from local county federations and boardroom discussions drive our government relations emphasis and results.



Does your farm business currently have access to natural gas?

17% YES 83% NO

OFA online poll survey — November 2016



MPPs and staff enjoyed tours and a day in the country at OFA's 2016 MPP Field Day.



More than 60 people joined OFA for the 2016 Field Day at King Cole Ducks, Newmarket, ON.



Hydro One Dedicates New Team to On-Farm Electricity Issues

Ontario farmers welcomed Hydro One's announcement of the new Farm Rapid Response Team at the September 2016 International Plowing Match. The team will improve outcomes for Ontario farmers and provide them with an easy, transparent, customer-friendly process with a clear escalation path to resolve uncontrolled electricity on farms.

Hydro One President and CEO Mayo Schmidt made the announcement saying, "uncontrolled electricity has plagued rural livestock farms for a very long time. Farmers and the animals they care for deserve our hardest efforts to resolve this issue. This customer-friendly process will improve outcomes for Ontario farmers and provide access to technical experts to help troubleshoot and find solutions."

Schmidt clearly listened to the messages from a number of pioneers on this issue and the voice of the Uncontrolled Electricity Working Group, calling for a plan to identify and eliminate ground current across Ontario's farm community.

The Farm Rapid Response Team will bring a consistent documented process to solving local uncontrolled electricity problems. This new team will lead to further cooperation with other utilities and all levels of government in attaining a satisfactory solution to ground current and uncontrolled electricity.

The Farm Rapid Response Team is the outcome of the Uncontrolled Electricity Working Group, made up of livestock and electricity stakeholders including Hydro One and OFA.

The Farm Rapid Response Team will:

- Manage and investigate all stray voltage and related on-farm electrical issues
- Ensure a full technical audit of all testing conducted
- Appoint testing specialists in zones across the province
- Conduct larger root cause investigations when needed
- Trouble-shoot and use alternative testing on more complex issues and complaints
- Collect data centrally for further work and study

Hydro One customers can call 1-888-405-3778 or email farmresponse@hydroone.com to connect with a member of the team.



Have you experienced electrical issues on your farm?

60% YES 40% NO

OFA online poll survey —April 2016



Uncontrolled electricity issues have gone unresolved on Ontario farms for years. The new Farm Rapid Response Team is committed to working with farmers to quickly address the issue.

A Better Road to Cutting Red Tape

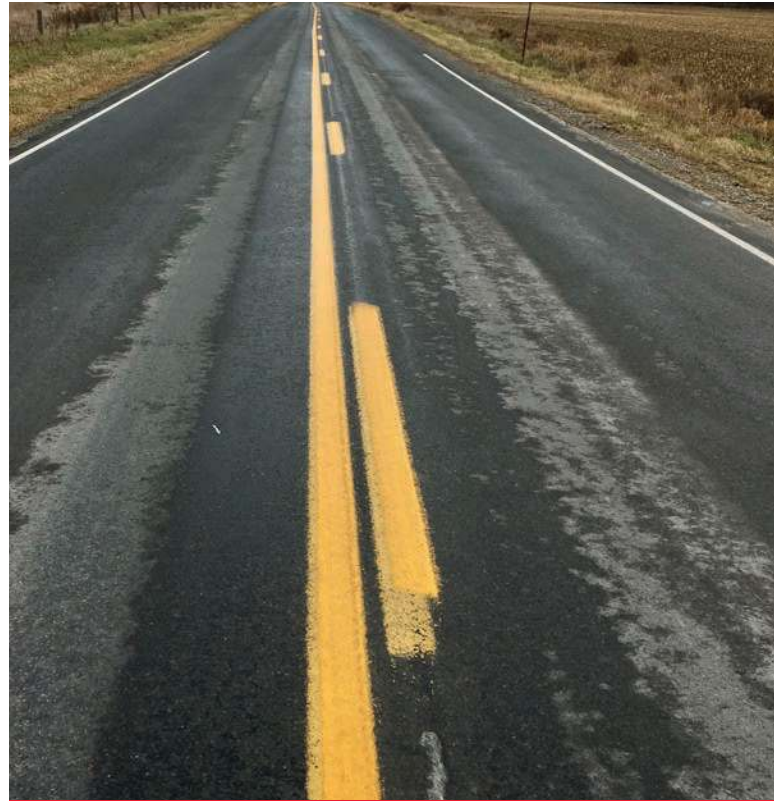
Over the years, many government initiatives have attempted to remove red tape and unnecessary barriers, and identifying specific barriers has always been the biggest challenge.

Six years ago, the Ontario government asked OFA to lead the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Consultations, which were part of Ontario's Open for Business Sector Strategy. OFA got to experience firsthand the challenge of identifying specific barriers. It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact underlying regulatory clause or government policy causing the impediment, let alone come up with the best workable solution. Nevertheless, OFA recommended that "Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) adopt an inclusive consultative model that actively involves the agriculture and agri-food sector in the regulatory development process." In response to that recommendation, OMAFRA established the Open for Business Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Consultation Forum.

The forum has also struggled to identify specific regulatory barriers that could be addressed at its annual or semi-annual meetings. A new approach was needed. In July 2016, OFA proposed that working groups be established as the need arises to investigate issues and bring back recommendations to the forum.

As an initial working group, OFA proposed that a working group be established to develop recommendations for issues related to the Ministry of Transportation (MTO). OFA identified several items this initial working group could investigate, including:

- Roundabout design specifications need to accommodate the dimensions of wide farm machinery
- Streamlining MTO requirements for obtaining farm licence plates
- Roadside loading of sugar beets and other crops at harvest
- MTO enforcement inconsistencies and status of the MTO Farm Guide
- Moving telehandlers used for farm purposes between farms
- Right-of-ways for drainage across 400 series roadways
- Need to retain Glanworth Rd. overpass over Hwy 401



OFA is part of a working group, together with the Ministry of Transportation, to identify transportation issues impacting Ontario farm businesses.

The first meeting of the transportation working group was held in fall 2016 to get a better understanding of transportation-related issues raised by stakeholders and their impact on the agri-food sector. Not only did stakeholders raise specific issues, but the meeting allowed for MTO to explain some of their challenges related to those issues. Further meetings are being planned to develop workable solutions.



Have you had transportation issues on roadways in your area?

61% YES 39% NO

OFA online poll survey — March 2016

Growing Agriculture in Your Municipality

Rural economic growth starts locally. There are many policies, procedures and priorities that impact the growth potential of rural communities across Ontario. That's why OFA's Policy Advisory Council (PAC) explored the barriers and opportunities to rural growth last year, focusing on Ontario's agricultural and agri-food businesses. Municipal policies and procedures were identified as the biggest obstacles to development and the greatest opportunity for growth.

Rural communities are significantly impacted by provincial and federal policies. However, there are many policy areas that local municipalities control or have influence over, including land use planning, property assessment and taxation, financial incentives, community food planning and consultation. The PAC identified all these areas as opportunities for municipalities to support rural and agricultural growth.

Agriculture is the key economic driver in rural Ontario. The Premier's Agri-Food Growth Challenge aims to double the annual growth rate and create 120,000 jobs in the agri-food sector by the year 2020. Agriculture and rural Ontario are poised for growth, and it's never been more important to have local municipal support to realize the growth potential and reduce impediments.

A Guide and Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality was developed as a resource for OFA members and municipalities. The checklist outlines five areas where municipalities can support agricultural economic growth, including best practices that municipal staff and council can reference when planning. The full guide and checklist are available at ofa.on.ca/growag.

1. Land use planning

As agriculture changes, official plans and zoning bylaws must adapt to reflect the Provincial Policy Statement – the government's policies on province-wide land use planning. In 2014, the newest Provincial Policy Statement identified and described three types of uses in prime agricultural areas: agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses. These changes are meant to reflect the innovation and entrepreneurship occurring

in rural areas, such as farm tourism and on-farm markets. Rural municipalities should update their local official plans and bylaws to reflect these changes so agricultural businesses can thrive.

2. Property assessment and taxation

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) values and classifies properties based on the use of land and buildings. Farm properties could be divided by MPAC into multiple property assessment classes if a property is used for more than one use, such as residential, farm, commercial and industrial.

While MPAC determines the property class, upper-tier and single-tier municipalities can support the viability of farm businesses by adjusting the farm tax ratio below 25% of the residential rate. The classification of buildings used for value-added agriculture, such as on-farm processing or retail, should also be considered. Although classification

How to Support Growth in Your Community

Here are some tips and resources for working with your municipality to grow agriculture in your area.

Work with your municipality

- Share OFA's *A Guide and Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality* with municipal councils and staff
- Invite municipal staff to work on agricultural development initiatives with your local county federation of agriculture (see ofa.on.ca/growag for a list)
- Source funding programs and incentives offered through your municipality

Promote local farm businesses

- Refer your preferred farm inputs businesses with OFA's online, searchable Farm Inputs Directory ofa.on.ca/farminputsdirectory

Tap into funding

- Visit ofa.on.ca/growag for a list of potential funding opportunities for your farm business and rural community

is set at the provincial level, OFA has developed a recommended taxation policy and municipal councils can show their support by sending a resolution to provincial ministries. A sample resolution is included in *A Guide and Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality*, available at ofa.on.ca/growag.

3. Financial incentives and reduced costs

Financial incentives can be offered to encourage business expansion. Municipalities could support rural agricultural growth through bylaw exemptions for development charges on new farm structures, submitting applications for municipal infrastructure funding and implementing community improvement plans in rural areas for agricultural businesses.

4. Community and regional food planning

A strong local food system benefits rural economies. The agricultural sector prospers when all areas of the value chain thrive – including farm input businesses, farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers, food establishments and consumers. OFA recommends municipalities support local farmers, agri-food businesses and the entire local food value chain by developing local food procurement policies and strategies to promote the sector to local residents and beyond.

5. Consultation with the farming community

One of the greatest barriers to a vibrant agriculture sector is a lack of understanding of normal and modern farming practices, and the realities of living close to farming neighbours. Local conservation authorities, municipal councils, and economic development and planning departments all play an integral role in the success of agriculture and agri-businesses. It's essential that municipal staff and elected officials understand the needs and challenges of the agriculture industry and know how to work together to overcome barriers and foster progress. OFA recommends local municipalities create an agricultural advisory committee, consult with farmers on policies affecting their farm businesses, such as roadways and bridges, and dedicate a farmer representative to local conservation authority boards.

Only 4% of the province's 1.8 million rural residents are farmers, but they are an integral part of the rural economy and the future of rural Ontario. OFA encourages members to explore opportunities with their municipality to grow agriculture. *A Guide and Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality* is a resource for both members and municipalities to identify opportunities to work together. OFA believes rural economic development can be stimulated with policies that support agriculture and agri-food businesses.



Does your rural community have access to natural gas?

24% YES 76% NO

OFA online poll survey — May 2016

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Ontario Farmland Values on the Rise

Every four years, the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) updates assessments on all properties for tax purposes, including farm property. Many Ontario farmers and landowners were shocked by the 2016 assessments that will see values rise by a whopping average of 70% over the next four years, beginning January 1, 2017.

Assessment appeals

Farmers saw similar increases across the province in the 2012 round of MPAC assessments. The steep hike in farmland values over two consecutive assessments has farmers worried about how these assessments will impact farming and more immediately, their property taxes.

The 2016 assessments were delivered to farm owners in October. For those who disagree with the values, February 8, 2017 is the deadline to file a Request for Reconsideration. If the deadline is missed, farmers and landowners can file a request for extension to file a Request for Reconsideration with the Assessment Review Board. For more information on this process visit mpac.ca.

Shouldering the tax burden

OFA has heard concerns from many members and county representatives about the soaring land values and the possible impact on their taxes. The 2016 assessed value will be phased in equally over four taxation years (2017-2020). Unless changes are made in property tax ratios, farm property taxes will be impacted as the new values are phased in because taxes are calculated by multiplying the assessed value by the local farm property tax rate. OFA is concerned about the tax shift onto farmland because farmland property values increased at a greater rate than any

other property classification in Ontario. To avoid this, tax ratios – the proportion of farm tax rate to residential tax rates – need to be adjusted across the province.

As property values go up, tax bills rise. That means farmers will be contributing a higher proportion of taxes to their municipalities – taxes that support local services and infrastructure like schools, hospitals, roads and emergency services. Unfortunately, farmland does not require many of the municipal services that farm owners are taxed on.

If farm taxes increase, farmers will be shouldering excessive property tax burdens. The rules now allow flexibility in the rate of tax applied to farmland. Farm taxes are calculated at 25% or less of the local residential tax rate. This provides the flexibility to adjust the farm rate to account for the differential increases in assessed values. In other words, we have the tool to counter the high assessments.

OFA reminds all county and regional federations to work with their municipalities (county level and single-tier municipalities can make adjustments to tax ratios) to adjust the farm tax ratio in their areas. Contact OFA for assistance in providing information and an analysis for your area.

MPAC is responsible for the farmland property assessments, but the farm tax ratio is the responsibility of each county, or single tier municipality. OFA encourages all members to thoroughly understand their farmland property assessments, the impacts the new value will have to their farms and tax bills, and address any tax ratio concerns with their local county or municipality.



Ontario farmland values are increasing at an approximate average rate of 70% over the next four years.



Will you be appealing your MPAC assessment?

50% YES 50% NO

OFA online poll survey — November 2016

Coordinated Land Use Planning

The release of the latest drafts of Ontario's four provincial land use plans in spring 2016 has opened the discussion on how to build complete communities and protect agricultural land from incompatible non-agricultural uses. The review complied with a statutory requirement that land use plans be reviewed at least every 10 years. The Minister of Municipal Affairs also formed a panel to make recommendations on the Greenbelt Plan, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan during 2016. The resulting report included 87 recommendations.

A public comment period was opened in 2016 to respond to the recommendations resulting from the 10-year review. OFA provided comments and supporting explanations to all four land use plans

and recommendations to the review report. OFA welcomed efforts to utilize more common language and policies across all four plans.

We objected to the failure to impose fixed, permanent urban boundaries on municipalities, to make urban intensification and greenfield densities mandatory and the application of "Greenbelt-level" natural heritage protection throughout the area subject to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. To read OFA's full report and comments on each plan, visit ofa.on.ca/issues.

OFA will continue to participate in the review of the four provincial land use plan recommendations and consultations. Appropriate land use and farmland preservation are critical and a top priority for OFA's ongoing advocacy work.

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Why Ontario Needs a Soil Strategy

In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) announced the development of an Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy – *Sustaining Ontario's Agricultural Soils: Towards a Shared Vision*. OFA participated in the consultation process and we look forward to the outcomes that include the next steps for farmers to engage in soil improvement across the province.

Soil health and resilience, soil conservation and sustainability, cover crops and organic matter are all critical factors in the sustainability of our agricultural system.

OFA believes that a real soil health program must start with clear baseline data on the current state of Ontario's soil. We have advocated for an investment in soil mapping across the province to determine what is currently "in the bank" and exactly what challenges and opportunities lie before us to improve soil health for future generations. A commitment of \$30 million towards soil health was announced in the Climate

Change Action Plan. Soil is a dynamic ecosystem and critical to our productivity, our biodiversity and our success in producing food for the future. Good management of this resource can ensure our soil is fertile and contains the living organisms needed to grow food, fibre and bioproducts.

Healthy soil requires years of natural processes. Poor stewardship, even for only a brief time, can easily deplete the soil. Constant efforts of sound stewardship practices are needed to ensure the sustainability of this vital resource.

Soil stressors include:

- Increasing demands on productivity for positive margins, and for an increasing provincial and global population
- Changes in cropping, tillage and other practices
- Extreme heat or precipitation events that can increase soil erosion and increase stress on soil and crops

Healthy soil is an essential input to a healthy agricultural sector. OFA intends to continue working closely with farmers, industry and government to develop a soil strategy to sustain farms and food forever.

A new soil health and conservation strategy is being developed to maintain soil health and sustainability in Ontario.



OFA: Serving Up Food Literacy

Food literacy is one of the key objectives of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's National Food Strategy. Teaching healthy, lifelong food habits to today's young adults – the next generation of consumers – is a challenge OFA is addressing with Six by Sixteen. A strategy to help promote food literacy and link food choices to local food, the Six by Sixteen campaign is growing.

Six by Sixteen is a collaborative program to teach young adults to plan and prepare six nutritious (and locally sourced) meals by the time they are 16 years old. Led by OFA, the program is supported by more than 20 partner organizations in Ontario – from all the main food group commodity organizations to Foodland Ontario and other local food initiatives.

In 2016, OFA and partners launched **SixbySixteen.me**, an online gateway to an extensive library of Canadian resources including how-to cooking videos, recipes and where to source Ontario-grown food. The site was launched with a coordinated

social media food contest and a live cooking demonstration with a local Ontario high school food and nutrition class.

The new **SixbySixteen.me** site continues to attract visitors of all ages, including young adults, parents, educators and public health professionals using the site as a hub of information for the home and classroom.



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Building a Workable Wildlife Strategy for Ontario

Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) is expanding the province's wildlife management strategy. Current strategies for managing "big game" species are focused exclusively on moose, deer, elk, caribou and black bears, and do not address the majority of Ontario's wildlife. Ontario is home to an extensive variety of wildlife species – 86 species of mammals, 493 species of birds, 24 reptiles, 23 amphibians and more than 25,000 invertebrates.

In 2016, MNRF released a discussion paper, "Building a Wildlife Management Strategy for Ontario". OFA responded, through the established feedback process, emphasizing the impact of wildlife damage on farm businesses. Ontario's current wildlife damage program only compensates livestock and poultry farmers for their losses – there is no similar compensation program for crop producers.

OFA emphasized three important points in our response to the ministry's discussion paper. We'd like to see these included in a new, inclusive provincial wildlife strategy.

1. Protect farm property

Crops, poultry and livestock must be protected from predation. A farmer's ability to provide protection must be an integral part of any wildlife management strategy. OFA believes hunting and trapping are key wildlife management tools. MNRF must communicate to the urban public and create an understanding of the vital role hunting and trapping play in wildlife management.

2. Communicate policies

We need the government to explain the rationale of their policy limiting the release of captured wildlife to within 1 km of its capture site. Too often urban residents and politicians advocate that urban wildlife (raccoons, coyotes, deer, etc.) should be released "in the countryside".

3. Increase public awareness

Visitors must have the permission of the farmer to access farmland for wildlife-related activities like hunting and trapping. **The *Trespass to Property Act* does not require farmers and landowners to post signage indicating public access is not permitted.** OFA is asking MNRF, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Attorney General, to broadly publicize the provisions in the *Trespass to Property Act* that do not require posting and signs on agricultural property to indicate private property or no trespassing. It is the responsibility of the public to understand these rules.



Have you made a claim in the past year for livestock lost to predators?

15% YES 85% NO

OFA online poll survey — August 2016



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Reviewing Ontario's Wetlands Conservation Policy

Work continues on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's (MNRF) development of a wetlands conservation policy. Phase 1 of the strategy development wrapped up in 2016 with OFA submitting comments on a discussion paper.

Through the review process, the MNRF aims to outline a vision, goals and objectives for wetlands in Ontario, and set out a series of government actions to improve wetland conservation over the next 15 years.

OFA contributed to the Phase 1 review with an eight-page Environment Bill of Rights submission identifying a number of areas that impact land owned and farmed by Ontario farmers. After reviewing responses from the 2015 discussion paper, MNRF released a "Wetland Conservation Strategy for Ontario 2016-2030" in 2016 and welcomed comments.

The new "Wetland Conservation Strategy for Ontario 2016-2030" proposes a wetlands conservation strategy with seven guiding principles.

1. Wetlands should be regarded as integral components of their watersheds, as part of a system of natural heritage and hydrologic features and areas, and as part of the larger landscape.
2. Wetlands and the ecological functions they perform provide important benefits (ecological, economic, cultural, spiritual and social) that are vital to the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Efforts to sustain these benefits should be a priority.
3. Wetlands should be conserved based on three hierarchical priorities:
 - Protection – retain existing wetlands
 - Mitigation – minimize further damage to wetlands
 - Restoration – improve wetland function on the landscape
4. Wetlands should be conserved based on a precautionary approach, and using the best available science, information and traditional knowledge.
5. Protection of provincially-significant wetlands is a priority, but conservation of all wetlands is encouraged.
6. Wetlands should be conserved in a manner that recognizes, and is informed by, the rights and interests of indigenous communities.
7. Wetlands should be conserved in strong partnership with other levels of government, private landowners, indigenous communities, non-government organizations and other stakeholders involved in wetland conservation.

OFA responded to the proposed strategy, emphasizing that agricultural lands are a valuable, finite and shrinking resource. Wetland restoration and compensation for wetland losses must never come at the expense of agricultural land. OFA's response reiterated the request that the province adopt a single, universally-applied definition for "wetlands", consistent with the 2014 Provincial Policy Statement. OFA also reiterated its position that "wetlands" and "wet land" are not the same – wetlands are marshes, swamps, fens and bogs, while wet land is simple agricultural land that is slow to dry up after a quick spring melt, or heavy rainfall.

A wetlands conservation policy is important to the province. OFA will continue to work with the MNRF to ensure the policy is clearly written, recognizes the value and importance of agricultural land, and does not impede farming practices.



Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is developing a wetlands conservation policy.

Agriculture and the *Invasive Species Act*

OFA has participated in every consultation and discussion process related to the enactment of the *Invasive Species Act*. Since the act's release in 2015, OFA continues representing the interests and concerns of Ontario farmers and OFA members as the legislature impacts farming practices.

The *Invasive Species Act* gives the provincial government the authority to eradicate invasive species in Ontario – the list includes asian carp, dog-strangling vine and phragmites.

The act defines an invasive species as one that is “not native to Ontario, or to a part of Ontario, and is harming or likely to harm the natural environment of Ontario or of the part of Ontario in which it is present. Or, the invasive species is likely to harm the natural environment of Ontario or part of the province”.

OFA supports the *Invasive Species Act*, but has concerns about how some details of the legislation will affect farm businesses. For example, the act only focuses on the impact of invasive species on the “natural environment” with no consideration to the impact on agricultural activities related to livestock, poultry or crops. The act does not recognize on-farm biosecurity protocols. OFA would like to see personnel enforcing the legislature be trained on biosecurity protocols by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. OFA is also concerned with the inclusion of “warrantless search” provisions in the act. OFA has outlined other concerns and suggestions to the government related to this new legislation and will continue to advocate for the interests of farm businesses in the *Invasive Species Act*.



Do you have wild parsnip on your farm?

51% YES 49% NO

OFA online poll survey — July 2016



Invasive species like phragmites are recognized in the Invasive Species Act as posing a threat to Ontario's natural environment.

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OFA Inputs Directory

OFA launched an online farm inputs directory in 2016. The online resource helps members find recommended products and services for their Ontario farm businesses. The directory also includes contact information for OFA Benefit Program Partners. The inputs directory was created in response to member requests – asking for referrals to trusted farm input businesses.

- Business listings are all referred by fellow OFA members
- The searchable map makes it easy to find farm input products and services in your area
- OFA members can refer a trusted farm input business to be added to the directory

Referrals are approved by OFA staff and the business is contacted to offer the opportunity to participate in the online farm inputs directory listing. Businesses can also request to be added to the directory, but require support from an OFA member.

Check out the directory at ofa.on.ca/farminputsdirectory to search for products and services in your area or to refer a business.



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Celebrating 80 years of OFA

OFA marked 80 years of advocacy in Ontario throughout 2016. Celebrations were held across the province, bringing current, past and potential members together. To mark this milestone, OFA held four unique contests throughout 2016 – 80 for 80 trivia, OFA farm gate challenge, bursaries and a trip to the World Ag Expo

Farm Gate Challenge

OFA invited members to beautify their gate signs to celebrate the 80th anniversary and a chance to win cash prizes. Congratulations to the winners.

80 for 80 Trivia Contest

OFA's 80 years of history were highlighted in this year-long trivia contest from November 2015-November 2016. A fun way to relive OFA history, the contest featured weekly online questions and monthly prizes.

Congratulations to monthly OFA member trivia winners:

December 2015	James Farrell, Bruce County
January 2016	Ronald Wilson, Dundas County
February 2016	Gavin Smuk, Hamilton-Wentworth
March 2016	Laura Cree, Hamilton-Wentworth
April 2016	Lisa Hern, Wellington County
May 2016	Brian Mizen, Bruce County
June 2016	Drew Crinklaw, Middlesex County
July 2016	Mary Jean and William Van Dorp, Northumberland County
August 2016	Jamie Ireland, Middlesex County
September 2016	James Callaghan, Lambton County
October 2016	Bruce Clark, Simcoe County
November 2016	Joyce Sonneveld, Niagara South



**1st Rebecca Hannam
– Wellington County**



**2nd Sharon Grose
– Wellington County**



**3rd Raymond Beauregard
– Stormont County**



**County Federation winner
– Dundas Federation of Agriculture**

Anniversary bursary winners

Three post-secondary students received a special 80th anniversary bursary at the 2016 annual general meeting. Anita Rastapkevicius from Elgin County, Cassidy Smith from Stormont County and Logan Emiry from Sudbury District were each awarded \$3,500 to help with their post-secondary education in an agricultural program.

Winners were selected for their volunteer and agricultural industry related accomplishments, interest in agriculture and rural issues, community involvement and academic performance.

Anita Rastapkevicius is completing her Bachelor's Degree in Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics (FARE) with a minor in Agronomy at the University of Guelph. Anita was raised on a fruit, vegetable and cash crop operation in West Lorne, ON.

Cassidy Smith comes from a family farm in Berwick, ON and is in her second year of the Farm Management and Technology program at McGill University.

Logan Emiry is in his first year at the University of Guelph in the Agriculture Science program and comes from a dairy farm in Massey, ON.

The bursary competition was open to students of OFA member families entering or currently pursuing a post-secondary education in an agricultural program. Winners were awarded regionally, with one winner from northern, eastern and southwestern Ontario.

Congratulations Anita, Cassidy and Logan!

Ag Expo trip

In the spirit of celebrating agriculture, OFA sponsored a group trip to the 2017 World Agriculture Expo in California. A year-long draw was open for one lucky OFA member to win two trip tickets. Ballots were available at all OFA displays throughout the 2016 farm show season.

Congratulations to our winner Sheila Mallen from Frontenac County.



Anita Rastapkevicius thanks OFA members at the 2016 annual general meeting for the OFA 80th anniversary bursary award.



Cassidy Smith receives the OFA 80th anniversary bursary award from local director Rejean Pommerville.



OFA director Mark Kunkel presents Logan Emiry with the OFA 80th anniversary bursary award.



OFA Member Service Representatives

Farmers Working for Farmers

Every OFA member has access to an experienced, knowledgeable Member Service Representative (MSR), ready to take your call to help with issues affecting your farm or region. As OFA employees, MSRs are the on-the-ground advocates for Ontario farm families. Our team of 21 MSRs is involved in most aspects of farm business and rural life, and represent a valuable benefit of your OFA membership.

Find your MSR

South and Western Region

Paul Nairn

Manager

Phone: 519-272-5533

Toll free: 1-844-272-5533

paul.nairn@ofa.on.ca

Gayle Bogart

Essex, Kent

Phone: 519-776-7960

Toll free: 1-800-222-8172

gayle.bogart@ofa.on.ca

Joanne Hughes

Bruce, Grey

Phone: 519-364-3050

Toll free: 1-800-275-9551

joanne.hughes@ofa.on.ca

Janet Licskai

Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk

Phone: 519-448-4710

Toll free: 1-866-823-8882

janet.licskai@ofa.on.ca

Janine Lunn

Elgin, Oxford

Phone: 519-637-7300

Toll free: 1-866-408-0128

janine.lunn@ofa.on.ca

Henry Swierenga

Halton, Hamilton-Wentworth,

Niagara North, Niagara South

Phone: 905-957-4280

Toll free: 1-866-957-4280

henry.swierenga@ofa.on.ca

Joanne Fuller

Lambton, Middlesex

Phone: 519-264-1444

Toll free: 1-877-668-3276

joanne.fuller@ofa.on.ca

Margaret Vincent

Huron, Perth

Phone: 519-482-9642

Toll free: 1-800-511-1135

margaret.vincent@ofa.on.ca

Nadine Gill

**Member Services Support
Representative**

Phone : 519-801-5293

Toll free: 1-855-801-5293

nadine.gill@ofa.on.ca

OFA Member Service Representatives

Find your MSR

Eastern and Northern Regions

Brian Hamilton

Manager

Phone: 613-646-2613

Toll free: 1-866-434-2613

brian.hamilton@ofa.on.ca

Deb Knapton

Arnprior, Lanark, Ottawa, Renfrew

Phone: 613-761-8426

Toll free: 1-855-761-7617

deb.knapton@ofa.on.ca

Gord Grant

Dufferin, Waterloo, Wellington

Phone: 519-343-5444

Toll free: 1-877-343-5444

gord.grant@ofa.on.ca

Mark Torrey

**Durham, Peterborough, and the
City of Kawartha Lakes/Haliburton**

Phone: 705-559-5208

Toll free: 1-866-433-0247

mark.torrey@ofa.on.ca

Ruth Vogel

**Dundas, Frontenac,
Grenville, Leeds**

Phone: 613-275-7291

Toll free: 1-866-440-7291

ruth.vogel@ofa.on.ca

Resi Walt

**Hastings, Lennox & Addington,
Northumberland, Prince Edward**

Phone: 613-847-3037

Toll free: 1-877-277-3037

resi.walt@ofa.on.ca

Leah Emms

Peel, Simcoe, York

Phone: 705-722-5511

Toll free: 1-866-660-5511

leah.emms@ofa.on.ca

Danielle Lefebvre

**Glengarry, Prescott, Russell,
Stormont**

Phone: 613-443-1778

Toll free: 1-866-484-1778

danielle.lefebvre@ofa.on.ca

Neil Tarlton

**Algoma, Manitoulin-North Shore/
Sudbury West, West Nipissing/
Sudbury East**

Phone: 705-692-7276

neil.tarlton@ofa.on.ca

Bob Norris

**Cochrane, East Nipissing/Parry
Sound, Muskoka, Temiskaming**

Phone: 705-647-0092

bob.norris@ofa.on.ca

Sandra Meyer

Kenora/Dryden, Thunder Bay

Phone: 807-475-7031

northern.mssr@ofa.on.ca

Rainy River, Kenora/Dryden

Phone: 1-866-434-2613

OFA Gets Involved Around the Province

OFA's Proud to Lead "Involve" Fund continues to promote member participation and leadership. In 2016, 20 county and regional federations hosted events, 80th anniversary celebrations and training days for members across the province. The program is funded by contributions from OFA, Farm Credit Canada and other sponsors from local federations. For more information or funding applications, visit ofa.on.ca/involvementfund.

Anniversary celebration

The Bruce County Federation of Agriculture had a double celebration in 2016 – the local federation's 75th anniversary and OFA's 80th anniversary. To mark these milestones, local volunteers hosted a special anniversary celebration with help from OFA's Proud to Lead "Involve" Fund.

The event, a celebration dinner with locally-sourced food and entertainment, drew more than 250 guests including past, present and (hopefully) future federation members and board members. Special guest Michael "Pinball" Clemons, gave a motivating presentation, inspiring Bruce County Federation of Agriculture members to look ahead to the next 75 years.



Celebrating two anniversaries – Bruce County Federation of Agriculture's 75th and OFA's 80th – organizers hosted a celebration with support from OFA's Proud to Lead "Involve" Fund.

Leading Environmental Education

The Prescott Federation of Agriculture leveraged OFA's Proud to Lead "Involve" Fund to host two educational workshops on improving the environmental



The Prescott Federation of Agriculture hosted educational workshops with Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) through OFA's Proud to Lead "Involve" Fund.

performance on farms to manage the challenges of climate change. The local federation teamed up with the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program to demonstrate leadership on a popular issue and encourage farmers to take a leading initiative in improving environmental practices on their farms. Two workshops – one in English and one in French – were facilitated by ALUS program coordinator Brendan Jacobs. The workshops created awareness of the ALUS Canada program that channels partner funding to farmers and ranchers invested in agricultural stewardship. Event organizers were encouraged by the participant interest and discussions following the workshops.

New and Beginning Farmers Meet in the Field

Four local county federations started discussions with new and beginning farmers at the 2016 Hastings County Plowing Match and Farm Show, an annual event that draws more than 12,000 attendees and 300 exhibitors. Hastings, Prince Edward, Lennox & Addington and Northumberland County Federations worked together to run the OFA exhibit. With the help of OFA's Proud to Lead "Involve" Fund, the group filled OFA branded cooler bags with literature, OFA and local contact information and the dates of upcoming federation

meetings and events. The cooler bags were handed out to new and beginning farmers, attendees who showed an interest in becoming an OFA member, and members who took the time to show their loyalty or discuss issues affecting their farm.

The event was a great success and gave event organizers and volunteers a way to engage with local federations and members.



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OFA Priorities for 2017

OFA starts 2017 with a new mission – **Farms and Food Forever** – to focus our work on the practice of sustainable farming, and the evolving symbiotic relationship between agriculture and consumers. The new mission guides our overall approach to advocating and serving Ontario farmers. Many of the issues we tackle are long term in nature, but action is urgently needed for a strong and sustainable farm system tomorrow. Our work this year includes topics you’ve been hearing about and can read about in more detail on the pages of this issue of *OFA Today*.

- ✓ Affordable, accessible energy, including natural gas, across rural Ontario
- ✓ Investments in rural infrastructure to help municipalities provide the roads, bridges, schools, and broadband that farms and rural businesses need
- ✓ Agriculture’s role in the Climate Change Action Plan, and its potential to help mitigate impacts of climate change
- ✓ Land use plans and policies that preserve farm land and water resources
- ✓ Creating a more effective regulatory system
- ✓ Support for the new *Waste Free Ontario Act* to reduce waste and dependence on rural landfills

Watch for updates throughout the year on these issues that will enable the agri-food industry to create opportunities for our sector to meet the Premier’s challenge for growth.



Are you optimistic about the provincial government’s attention to agriculture?

8% YES 92% NO

OFA online poll survey — January 2016

New Climate Change Working Group

The provincial government released the Climate Change Action Plan in 2016 to lay the groundwork for how Ontario will reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet reduction targets.

In response to this plan, OFA has convened a new Ontario-based industry group – the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Climate Change Working Group. The group aims to work collectively to find opportunities to contribute to climate change mitigation, discuss opportunities for agriculture to provide offset credits to regulated industries, and discuss issues and solutions towards agricultural adaptation to climate change.

OFA is encouraged the government is making climate change a priority, including \$30 million previously announced in the Climate Change Action Plan.

Watch for more news about the new working group throughout 2017.



Do you see opportunities for ag in the Climate Change Action Plan?

18% YES 82% NO

OFA online poll survey — June 2016

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