

Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality

This checklist is accompanied by a *Guide to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality*. Please consult the *Guide* for further information on how to implement the actions in the Checklist, and why they are important for supporting the agricultural sector in your municipality.

I. Land Use Planning

- ☐ Outlined a clear definition and policy for on-farm diversification, value-added agriculture, and agri-tourism in municipal policies
- ☐ Clearly identified permitted uses, and uses with a lesser connection to agriculture, in agricultural zones in municipal policies (use 2014 Provincial Policy Statement definitions of *agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses*)
- ☐ Developed *as-of-right* zoning criteria for a proposed use that is compatible with neighbouring agricultural uses to reduce red tape (e.g. building permit is given if proposal is in accordance with the criteria)
- ☐ Staff are informed that non-agricultural land uses located within lands designated for agriculture can negatively impact the ability of surrounding agricultural operations to expand or to introduce new agricultural activities, particularly through mandated separation distances imposed by the Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) formulae
- ☐ Municipal staff are informed about normal farm practices and related policies
- ☐ Use site plan controls in the Official Plan to receive, review and approve site plans, which can help avoid some concerns (traffic, parking, etc.) related to new developments
- ☐ Ensure that the roads department incorporates design features for roads, bridges and traffic circles that allow for the safe passage of large farm equipment

II. Property Assessment and Taxation

- ☐ Adjusted the farm tax ratio below 25% of the residential tax rate
- ☐ Passed a resolution supporting OFA policy on taxation for buildings used for value-added agriculture (i.e. Facilities should be subject to no more than 25% of the residential property tax rate, if historically at least 51% of the product is grown and value-added to by the same farmer(s), and at least 90% of the product is grown in Ontario); *See Template on Page 4: Sample Resolution Supporting a Change in Tax Treatment of On-Farm Value-Added Activities*

III. Financial Incentives and Reduced Costs

- ☐ Enacted a by-law with exemption from development charges for new farm structures
- ☐ Passed a resolution supporting OFA policy on the amendment of the Development Charges Act; *See Template on page 5: Sample Resolution Supporting an Amendment of the Development Charges Act to Exempt New Farm Buildings*
- ☐ Submitted an application to the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF)
- ☐ Implemented business development strategies, such as Community Improvement Plans, that encourage private investment, renew infrastructure, and waive development fees for agricultural and agri-food businesses

IV. Community and Regional Food Planning

- ☐ Supported development of incubator kitchens, regional distribution hubs, farmers' markets, mobile grocery stores, and other initiatives to support the regional food system
- ☐ Promoted consumer awareness of the benefits of local food through municipal or regional food system branding (e.g. *Buy Local! Buy Fresh!* campaigns)
- ☐ Developed a local food procurement policy to support farmers and farm businesses
- ☐ Hired or designated a current staff member as a Local Food Coordinator, responsible for promoting local food campaigns and events
- ☐ Conducted asset mapping to identify gaps and opportunities in the regional food system

V. Consultation

- ☐ Created an Agricultural Advisory Committee to encourage consultation with the agricultural community, and ensure that the comments are shared with Council
- ☐ Ensured that producers and processors engage with the Food Policy Council, if applicable
- ☐ Consulted with farmers on direct farm marketing, agri-tourism and value-added policies
- ☐ Met with community leaders in the farming community to understand how local zoning by-laws affect farms, especially for value-adding and on-farm diversification
- ☐ Consulted the farm community to ensure that any new roads, bridges and traffic circles are sized for modern farm equipment
- ☐ Dedicated a farmer representative to the board of the conservation authority to improve working relationships, particularly related to reviewing permit applications

Municipal Land Use Planning Principles to Support Agriculture

1. On-farm diversification is critical to economically sustainable agriculture in Ontario.

On-farm diversification helps to keep farmers on the land, helps to sustain the industry, improves income streams, and provides employment opportunities for the local community.

2. Local agriculture and locally available produce is good for the health of the community and good for the local economy.

Locally produced products are fresher, often taste better and can help establish a connection between consumers and food production. It also provides jobs and contributes to the economy.

3. Protection of agricultural land is good.

Much effort has been exerted to protect the province's remaining prime and speciality farmland. There must be adequate economic support to ensure the long-term prosperity of the farm industry.

4. An evolving definition of agriculture is good.

Farmers have many opportunities to pursue new diversified initiatives. Continue to expand upon the definition of agriculture in a way that maintains the connection to farms and farming.

5. A connection to agriculture is good.

As long as the proposed use has clear connections to the farm, there may be additional economic opportunities. Direct farm marketing and agri-tourism can help farmers remain economically viable

6. Flexibility is good.

Wherever possible, use as-of-right zoning to permit a wider range of agricultural-related and on-farm diversified uses. For uses with an indirect connection to agriculture, official plans can provide evaluation criteria for zoning applications.

7. Clarity is good.

At times planning policies have been subject to differing interpretations. To the degree possible, definitions and policy should be clearly presented.

8. Compatibility between different land uses is good.

Although this will vary, there is a need to ensure that agricultural-related and on-farm diversified uses are appropriately integrated into the current zoning and planning framework.

9. Fairness in the property tax system is good.

On-farm diversification is about providing farmers with more opportunities. The property tax system should support the agricultural nature of agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses.

10. Recognizing different geographies is good.

Communities will benefit from policy that addresses the diverse local needs across Ontario.

Adapted from: Wayne Caldwell for Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association (2006). Jurisdictional Analysis and Best Practices for Land Use Planning Affecting Direct Farm Marketing and Agri-tourism Operations in Ontario

Sample Resolution

Support a Change in Tax Treatment of On-Farm Value-Added Activities

WHEREAS, the increase in property tax resulting from a reclassification from Farm to Commercial/Industrial inhibits many farm businesses from engaging in on-farm retail, processing and other value-added activities; and

WHEREAS, these activities will lead to increased investment, create jobs and boost the local economy; and

WHEREAS, the Ontario Premier issued an Agri-Food Growth Challenge to double the annual growth rate of the agri-food sector and create 120,000 new jobs by 2020;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Council of _____, asks the government of Ontario to examine the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's proposal for how to classify and tax the land and buildings associated with on-farm value-added activities, and enact the proposal or a reasonable modification of it, with a view to encourage farm businesses to further invest in these activities to stimulate the rural economy and help meet the Ontario Premier's Agri-Food Growth Challenge.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, this resolution be circulated to all municipal and regional councils in Ontario requesting that they endorse and support this resolution and communicate their support to the Premier, and her Ministers of Finance, Economic Development and Growth, Tourism, Culture and Sport, and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Sample Resolution

Support an Amendment of the Development Charges Act to Exempt New Farm Buildings

WHEREAS, the Development Charges Act enables municipalities to apply development charges, however, most Ontario municipalities have chosen to exempt new farm buildings from municipal development charges; and

WHEREAS, farm buildings do not contribute to the need for added municipal capital expenditures; and

WHEREAS, if a municipality applies development charges to new farm buildings, while a neighbouring municipality does not, an inter-regional inequity is created; and

WHEREAS, standardizing the application of development charges to agriculture through a province-wide exemption would prevent farmers from facing inequitable treatment in a minority of municipalities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Council of _____, asks the government of Ontario to examine the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's proposal to provide a statutory exemption of municipal development charges in the Development Charges Act for new farm buildings and structures, ensuring equitable treatment of farms in all Ontario municipalities, and reduce the disproportionate financial burden of municipal capital expenditures on farmers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, this resolution be circulated to all municipal and regional councils in Ontario requesting that they endorse and support this resolution and communicate their support to the Premier, and her Ministers of Municipal Affairs, and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.