



# **Agriculture *Matters***

**2018 Municipal Elections Kit  
for County Federations**

**DRAFT**

# Introduction

Local government is a building block of democracy and a source of important services including schools, hospitals, roads, animal control, policing, weed control, fire and ambulance, welfare and recreation that contribute to the success of farms and business and the quality of life. There is a cost for these services and infrastructure. It is up to citizens to be informed and to participate in elections to ensure that they get the services and infrastructure they want at prices they are willing to pay.

Nearly all forms of government implement programs and policies in the interests of the majority. Perhaps the greatest value in a democratic system is that it strives to protect the rights of minorities as well. **Farmers are a minority;** even at the local level.

Those not directly involved in farming often do not recognize the importance of the agricultural sector - to the environment, to the economy, and spinoffs all along the value chain. If you wish to have your rights and interests understood and advocated for, you must be a citizen in every sense and participate in your democracy. Be informed, be active. Be respectful of others.

This Municipal Elections Kit, along with the Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff, can be used to assist you in identifying issues that prospective councillors and municipal staff need to hear about and understand. It also provides advice on ways and means of ensuring those who are governing your communities understand and will act in the best interests of the farm community; the community that drives the local economy, provides food and fuel, jobs for others and ensures a better environment for all.

If we do not participate in elections, we are still free to blame others for the government we get; knowing that it will not do any good. So, become informed, support candidates you feel will do the best for your community, and perhaps consider becoming one of those candidates too.

For an electronic version of this document, please visit [ofa.on.ca/GrowAg](http://ofa.on.ca/GrowAg).

## Letter from the General Manager

To Members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA):

OFA is very pleased to provide this toolkit to facilitate productive discussions in the upcoming municipal elections and for ongoing conversations with your municipality.

Many local government decisions and actions help farms and farm families, but some may unintentionally generate added costs or problems. In rural Ontario, farmers are a minority. There are usually more teachers and more retirees in a county than farmers, and there could be more office and factory workers. All of these people are important members of our communities, but farm interests and keeping rural areas vibrant - so farms can be productive and profitable - is essential for you and your families. Having a farm voice on council and having all councillors well-informed about farm interests has never been more important.

Your role can be to ensure that all candidates for municipal office hear the concerns of their farm constituents. You can make sure that services to farmers, farm families and farm businesses are top-of-mind in local elections.

We wish you well in your work on behalf of your farm business and the farm families in your communities. By working together and actively contributing to the dialogue, we can secure political direction to help our farms thrive now and in coming generations.

Sincerely,

Neil Currie  
General Manager  
Ontario Federation of Agriculture

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Letter from the General Manager</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Sample Letter to Candidates</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Questions to Ask Candidates</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Land Use Planning and Economic Development</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Municipal Official Plans .....	6
Comprehensive Zoning By-laws.....	6
Farming and Food Production Protection Act and Municipal By-Laws .....	6
Agricultural Representation in Municipal Governance .....	6
Rural Economic Development .....	6
Broadband Internet .....	7
Community and Regional Food Planning .....	7
Food and Organic Waste.....	7
Municipal Farm Property Tax Ratio .....	7
Taxation of Buildings on Farms.....	7
Development Charges on New Farm Buildings .....	7
<b>Environment and Animal Welfare</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Nutrient Management and Pesticides .....	8
Noxious Weed Control .....	8
Predation and Wildlife Management .....	8
Rabies .....	8
Drainage .....	8
Water .....	9
<b>Energy</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Hydro.....	10
Natural Gas and Renewable Natural Gas.....	10
Community Energy and Emissions Planning.....	10
Alternative Energy Opportunities on Farms .....	10
Waste Resource Management.....	10
<b>Infrastructure and Social Services</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Roads, Bridges and Traffic Circles .....	11
Abandoned or Former Railway Rights-Of-Way .....	11
Land Ambulance and Farm 911 Signs.....	11
Rural Child Care .....	11
Rural School Closures and School Trustees .....	11

## Sample Letter to Candidates

***[County Executives are asked to modify this letter or write one of their own to tell local candidates what can be done for rural electors and the farm economy in their county]***

Dear Municipal Candidates:

Congratulations on choosing to run for council. We admire and respect this initiative in all candidates. Not enough people say thank you to those who provide public service. Please accept our thanks for your efforts in standing for office. We know it is a sacrifice of time with family and friends and from your work, and we hope that it proves to be personally satisfying for you.

The farmers in \_\_\_\_\_ County/Region/District want to work with councillors who will grow and manage this community, so it prospers in every sense. We expect councillors to manage costs and achieve value for local tax dollars. We want you to maintain the existing services and infrastructure, to trim where it is necessary, and to stimulate growth where possible by attracting investment. We want our community to have a healthy economic base while continuing to be a safe, vibrant place to raise and educate our families.

Ontario's 50,000 farms gross nearly \$13 billion dollars in farm cash receipts annually; while the entire agri-food sector contributes over \$39 billion in GDP and employs over 820,000 Ontarians. *(For County-specific statistics, visit <http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/stats/county/index.html>)* Our county has \_\_\_\_\_ farms and we employ \_\_\_\_\_ people. If you are elected to council, we ask you to work for policies that will help our farms and food businesses prosper.

Ontario's economic prosperity began by feeding people, and it can be a growing part of our future. We need your help with water, drainage, conservation, roads, weed control, and many other issues to help make \_\_\_\_\_ County/Region/District thrive as a food producer. This sector can grow the economy, and we want your help.

Please take a balanced view with respect to parks, police, social programs so that the lifestyle here is not neglected. In particular \_\_\_\_\_ (water testing, sports, daycare, new facilities at the hospital) should be attended to by the next council.

The \_\_\_\_\_ Federation of Agriculture has \_\_\_\_\_ members. Please let us know either in person or by reply to this letter, what you will promote and what you will do to help build the farm economy and this County into a place we can all be proud to call home.

Sincerely,

# Questions to Ask Candidates

The following sample questions are provided to assist County Federations during municipal elections. Choose questions that are the most important to your agricultural community.

## *Land Use Planning and Economic Development*

### **Municipal Official Plans**

- From your perspective, what does Ontario mean by Prime Agricultural Lands?
- What are the implications of non-farm rural development in prime agricultural areas?
- How will you balance decisions between urban expansions and preserving farmland? Will you commit to protecting agricultural land in your municipality from non-agricultural uses and from urban expansion?
- What priority do you place on agricultural land use issues?
- Do you support the redevelopment of underused urban lands and higher density residential development as a means to preserve prime agricultural lands for food production?

### **Comprehensive Zoning By-laws**

- What is your position on the development of on-farm, value-added activities?
- How would you propose to consult with the farm community in the development or review of the Official Plan or zoning by-laws?

### **Farming and Food Production Protection Act and Municipal By-Laws**

- Are you aware of the by-law provisions in the Farming and Food Production Protection Act?
- Do you support pre-consultation with our local Federation of Agriculture and/or Agricultural Advisory Committee to ensure municipal by-laws do not unduly restrict normal farm practices?

### **Agricultural Representation in Municipal Governance**

- Where will you seek advice on issues that could affect agriculture?
- How will you contribute to and learn from the Agricultural Advisory Committee?

### **Rural Economic Development**

- Where does agriculture fit into your economic development priorities for the municipality?
- What businesses are you aware of that contribute to, or benefit from, the farm businesses in your community?

## **Broadband Internet**

- What is the municipality currently doing to expand broadband to underserved areas?
- How does internet availability and reliability affect the lives and livelihoods of rural residents? How does it impact economic development in our community?
- How will you work with local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to ensure farmers are getting the reliable broadband internet service that they need?
- What initiatives will you champion to support reliable access to broadband internet across our entire municipality?

## **Community and Regional Food Planning**

- How did you celebrate Local Food Week in June? Agriculture Week in October?
- What will you do to support marketing opportunities for local farm products? How will you help to get locally-produced food onto the shelves of local stores?
- What measures will you take to ensure members of the community have access to locally-produced and affordable food?

## **Food and Organic Waste**

- Who will you partner with to develop regional solutions around food waste?
- Will you consider establishing a regional anaerobic digester with the dual purpose of final stage organic waste consumption, and production of low or net-zero energy?

## **Municipal Farm Property Tax Ratio**

- Are you willing to support reducing the farm property tax ratio to ensure the percentage of the municipal tax revenue contributed by the farm property class remains consistent with previous years?

## **Taxation of Buildings on Farms**

- Are you willing to support adopting the new commercial and industrial subclasses that encourage on-farm, value-added agricultural enterprises and address the excessive property taxes currently imposed on these activities?
- How will you incorporate support for value-added farm enterprises into the municipality's economic development plan?

## **Development Charges on New Farm Buildings**

- Do development charges apply to agricultural structures in this municipality?
- Do you support the OFA position that all new farm buildings in Ontario should be exempt from development charges?

## Environment and Animal Welfare

### Nutrient Management and Pesticides

- The Province holds the sole authority to regulate pesticides and land-applied nutrients in all municipalities. Will you support repealing any existing by-laws that deal with either pesticides or land-applied nutrients?

### Noxious Weed Control

- Will you ensure that municipal properties, including parks, recreational trails and road allowances adjacent to agricultural lands, are kept weed free?
- Will you commit to ensuring that municipal weed inspectors keep all properties adjacent to agricultural lands weed free?

### Predation and Wildlife Management

- Do you support a municipal program to compensate licensed hunters or trappers who remove nuisance coyotes preying on livestock or poultry?
- Do you support Sunday gun hunting during the normal open season for deer, wild turkey, etc.?
- Do you agree that municipal “no discharge of firearms” by-laws should only apply to built-up, urban areas within the municipality?

### Rabies

- How will you ensure that public health is aware of the rabies vaccination regulations and that they are appropriately handling enforcement without burdening farmers?

### Drainage

- Do you understand the roles and responsibilities of the municipality for agricultural land drainage under the *Drainage Act* and the *Tile Drainage Act*?
- Non-farm developments adjacent to farmland often entail sizable site grading, which can change natural drainage patterns. Drainage problems can be created at the newly created site, adjacent farms, or both. How will you ensure that adjacent properties are not negatively impacted by drainage?



## Water

- What are the key water management issues in the area?
- What is the current quality of our municipal water?
- What priority do you assign water resource protection for the municipality?
- Do you support the need for municipalities to ‘take control’ of the area immediately adjacent (e.g. 100 meters) to a wellhead or surface water intake, by either purchasing or leasing the land?
- How will you ensure that individuals owning property near municipal well heads or within intake protection zones will not be negatively impacted?
- What level of financial support should be available to farmers who are required to incur capital costs, and/or management costs, and/or ongoing maintenance costs to protect a municipal drinking water supply?
- How will you site future municipal water supplies to **minimize the impact on neighbouring properties**, given the emphasis that the Clean Water Act places on source water protection?
- How would you allocate water at times of shortages? What priority will farm practices such as watering livestock and irrigating crops be given in the allocation of water, at times of shortages?
- What will be done to reduce effluent discharged from municipal sewage treatment plants?
- What funding is currently available to an individual farm business wishing to improve existing practices? What assistance will the municipality provide?

## Energy

### Hydro

- Are you aware of the electricity distribution system in this municipality? If so, what is it (i.e. served by Hydro One or a Public Utility Commission)?
  - *(If served by a PUC/LDC)* How will you ensure costs are maintained while improving service?
  - *(If served by Hydro One)* What will you do to ensure that hydro maintenance and repair services are adequate?
- How will you address concerns regarding unacceptable levels of service, maintenance or repair?
- Are you willing to have the council appear at hydro rate hearings to improve the quality of service and distribution rates for power?

### Natural Gas and Renewable Natural Gas

- What efforts would you undertake to bring gas service to or expand natural gas service in the rural parts of the county?
- Would you support Local Improvement by-laws for natural gas service?

### Community Energy and Emissions Planning

- How would you encourage public participation in your municipality's energy management planning?
- How do you plan to move towards more integrated and longer-term energy planning?

### Alternative Energy Opportunities on Farms

- How will you encourage on-farm energy generation projects to meet local needs?

### Waste Resource Management

- What should the municipality be doing to reduce its dependence on landfills? How can programs for the 3R's be improved for rural areas?
- What are your views on initiatives resulting from the *Waste-Free Ontario Act*?
- What are your views on mandatory recycling and user-pay collection systems?

## *Infrastructure and Social Services*

### **Roads, Bridges and Traffic Circles**

- How will you ensure that the roads department incorporates design features for roads, bridges and traffic circles that allow for safe passage of farm equipment?
- When new roads, bridges or traffic circles are proposed for rural areas with farm equipment traffic, how will you ensure that the farm community is fully consulted to ensure that they are sized for modern farm equipment?

### **Abandoned or Former Railway Rights-Of-Way**

- How would you ensure that full responsibility for the construction, maintenance and repairs of the fences along former railway rights-of-way are fulfilled?

### **Land Ambulance and Farm 911 Signs**

- How are land ambulance services provided / operated? What will you do to ensure that rural areas have adequate emergency services?
- What are the current response times for land ambulance and how do they compare with the Provincial standards? How can response times be improved?
- How does the municipality handle civic addresses on vacant properties? Is there a program in place for farmers to request a civic address for vacant farm land? What is the fee?

### **Rural Child Care**

- To what extent have the needs of rural areas in the development and operation of local child care plans been addressed?
- Are child care programs/services coordinated with other family/children services delivered in the municipality/district?
- What additional support/tools are required by the municipalities to deliver child care programs that meet rural needs?

### **Rural School Closures and School Trustees**

- Given the many challenges with the pupil accommodation review, do you support a moratorium on rural school closures until the challenges can be addressed?
- Given the fact that schools in rural communities serve several purposes, what priority will you give to the value of these schools?
- How will you ensure that rural students will not be negatively impacted by decisions you make? Will you consider putting guidelines in place regarding bus times?
- Do you understand what your role as a school trustee will be? Do you understand relationship between the role of the school board and the role of the province?