

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

Spring is an exciting and busy time in Ontario agriculture. As farmers get ready to get back on the land, we've been busy at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) advocating for the 38,000 Ontario farm families we represent.

This winter issue of *From the Field* provides a quick summary of the activities, issues and legislation we've been focused on for the last few months that impact the sustainability and prosperity of Ontario's agri-food sector.

Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sector contributes nearly \$40 billion to Ontario's economy and supports more than 822,000 jobs from field to fork. As the largest general farm organization in Ontario, it's our role to bring the interests of our members to provincial politicians and policymakers (as well as at the municipal and federal level) to ensure they can continue to operate profitable, sustainable and productive farm businesses.

From the Field is one of the ways we communicate directly with provincial policymakers about the opportunities and the challenges facing Ontario farmers, farm businesses and rural communities. Please take a few moments to read about our activities, and we hope to see you at our meetings this March at Queen's Park.



Reducing red tape responsibly

OFA is a strong advocate for eliminating unnecessary red tape and regulatory burden for Ontario's agricultural community. As the provincial government looks to reduce red tape under its open-for-business bylaws, including the proposed Bill 66 *Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, 2018*, OFA will always advocate for the concerns of Ontario agriculture.

OFA is encouraged by the government's decision to remove Schedule 10 – a proposed amendment to the provincial *Planning Act* that would have given municipalities the ability to pass bylaw changes that could use primary farmland for any type of development.

Farmland is a finite resource. We can't make more and must do everything we can to protect it for food production. There are tremendous opportunities for prosperity across Ontario that don't come at the expense of the province's farmland resource.

There are several other acts covered in the proposed bill that impact Ontario farmers and OFA has outlined our position in a formal submission to Minister Smith.

- *Agricultural Employees Protection Act, 2002*: We support the changes to Schedule 1 of this Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs act that would extend the act to workers in the ornamental horticulture sector.

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The rising role of agri-food to our economy



Our agri-food sector is thriving and diverse, and holds continued promise for prosperity across Canada. At OFA, we captured the key aspects of this opportunity in our Producing Prosperity in Ontario campaign (producingprosperity.ca). We shared these messages with candidates in the 2018 provincial and municipal elections, and we'll be reiterating them in the upcoming federal election.

Our agriculture industry and rural communities hold tremendous, often untapped, value for the entire country. To continue to grow and prosper, the agri-food sector and rural communities depend on real investments. We need the federal government to get money out the door and into Ontario to keep us competitive as we continue to develop our sustainable food system.

These are the three key infrastructure investments we need to continue to deliver to the bottom line of the entire country.



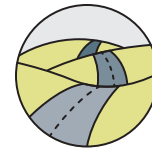
AFFORDABLE, AVAILABLE ENERGY.

Ontario has the highest energy rate in the country. OFA continues to advocate for expanded natural gas infrastructure – with federal investment – throughout rural Ontario. Energy is the highest input cost for many farm businesses. Access to affordable energy will provide a competitive edge to help our sector drive further growth. See our related story on page 4.



RELIABLE, HIGH-SPEED INTERNET.

Across urban Ontario and Canada, reliable internet is a given. But in rural and remote areas, our businesses, schools and communities continue to struggle with inconsistent services. It's been more than two years since the CRTC declared broadband a basic service, and it's time for a real plan on this promised broadband strategy.



UPGRADED ROADS AND BRIDGES.

The goods and services produced by the agri-food sector depend on roads and bridges to travel to and from market. Our industry needs a continued commitment at all levels of government to invest in rural infrastructure that will keep our industry moving efficiently.

OFA continues to advocate for distributing economic development across urban and rural areas that will create more jobs, build more affordable housing and secure a more sustainable local food system.

Working together to boost rural investments

As the leading advocate for Ontario agriculture, the OFA represents the interests of our agri-food sector and rural communities with all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal. One of our pressing issues is the need for reliable, high-speed internet. Better broadband is vital for Ontario farms and our rural communities. We depend on the internet to make business decisions, market farm products and operate on-farm technology. Our communities depend on reliable internet to drive economic development and support our schools and local businesses.

When the CRTC classified high-speed internet as a basic service and committed \$750 million over five years to upgrade service, Ontario farmers and rural businesses were hopeful. But the details of this investment will exclude 100,000 families in southwestern Ontario alone from upgrades to their internet service. We need the CRTC to reevaluate its criteria for who gets a broadband update.

OFA is urging federal politicians to ensure the CRTC reconsider its eligibility and assessment criteria for expanded high-speed service across rural Ontario. And we need support from provincial politicians to help make this happen.

To strengthen our voice for better broadband, OFA has encouraged rural Ontarians to send a letter to federal politicians at actnow.ofa.on.ca to let them know the importance of reliable high-speed internet for every rural community in Ontario. Nearly 450 letters have been sent to the federal Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and the new Minister of Rural Economic Development. Each letter is also copied to the Hon. Ernie Hardeman and Hon. Monte McNaughton to keep our provincial representatives informed of the need for improved internet services across rural Ontario.



The trouble with the farm property tax model

Property tax is a complicated issue. How taxes are calculated, how and when they are adjusted, and how they reflect the services received from a municipality. Ontario's farm property tax system is equally complicated. Farm property taxes are legislated to be up to 25% of residential rates to reflect the fact that farmland uses fewer municipal services than residences and businesses.

OFA has been working with municipalities across the province to advocate for fair farm taxes, and help local municipal councilors develop a fair farm property tax system. Here are key points about the state of farm property taxes in Ontario.

- Property taxes are intended to pay for municipal services. The residential tax rate pays for services used by households including recreation, health and protection services. Farmers pay the residential rate on their homes because their households need those same municipal services.
- Unserved farmland is legislated to be taxed at up to 25% of the residential rate because much fewer municipal services are required.

- Property taxes are based on property value. And in the last few years, farm property values have risen by an average of 64% across Ontario while residential property values in rural areas have been relatively flat.
- Farmers are paying a disproportionate amount of property tax compared to the services they use.

OFA believes some municipalities need to adjust their farm property tax rate. We've been travelling around the province to talk about the farm property tax system with municipal councilors, encouraging them to correct unfair tax burdens that will ensure competitive and sustainable farms across Ontario.

The municipal tax burden has shifted to unserved farmland and away from the residences and businesses that actually need and use the municipal services that property tax is intended to cover.



EBR activity report

Part of OFA's role to advocate and support sustainable farm businesses across Ontario involves the work our of farm policy research team. We review legislative changes and provide background for official Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR). Here are the most recent EBR submission OFA has made so far in 2019.

ISSUE	OFA POSITION
Increasing housing supply in Ontario	OFA disagrees with the government's position that inadequate land supply is behind the housing problem. Ontario's agri-food sector is a leading contributor to the provincial economy, and any provincial policy that threatens the agri-food sector by removing productive farmland for development is short sighted and counterproductive.
Clean Fuel Standard Regulatory Design Paper	OFA supports a clean fuel standard requiring higher ethanol content and other sustainable green fuels. We recognize the federal government's intention should complement Canada's approach to pricing carbon pollution by driving investments in cleaner fuels and technology.
Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan	OFA recognizes that as global temperatures rise, we are experience more frequent extreme weather events and patterns. Policies, programs and research must be developed to reduce the causes of climate change, while enabling farmers to adapt and respond to adverse climate effects. Ontario's agricultural land provides a critical range of environmental and ecological goods and services that benefit all Ontarians. Climate change policies must not impact the ability of Ontario farmers to compete in domestic and international markets.
Proposed open-for-business planning tool and new regulation under the Planning Act	Agri-food has been identified as a key sector for growth in Canada with untapped potential for growth and expansion. If we lose agricultural land...it's lost forever. OFA strongly opposes the propose open-for-business planning tool as it would undercut decades of land use planning, and there is no demonstrated need for these provisions. A loss of farmland will bring a loss of rural businesses, a loss of innovation and technology advancements in the sector, and a loss of employment for on-farm processing and agritourism. It will also be a loss for the rural communities the Ontario government promised to support.
Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, 2018	OFA is a strong advocate for eliminating unnecessary red tape and regulatory burden for Ontario's agricultural community. OFA was encouraged to see Schedule 10 removed from Bill 66 and strongly urges the government to continue to listen to the concerns and consider the implications of the agri-food sector and rural communities in further regulatory changes.
CRTC: High-speed broadband internet access	Reliable, high-speed internet is vital for modern agriculture, and our rural communities must have access to better broadband to stimulate economic development. High-speed internet is a necessity, not a luxury, across rural Ontario.
Meat Regulation/ Food Safety and Quality Act	OFA supports the proposed amendments that will help modernize this regulation, but believes further information and amendments are needed to continue to reduce red tape and regulatory burdens for provincially-inspected meat processors.

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- *Toxics Reduction Act, 2009:* We support the proposed changes to Schedule 5 of this Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks act to make it easier to report violations on toxic substances. OFA supports the intent to make it easier for people to report violations. We encourage the government to ensure compliance systems conduct scientifically sound investigations to avoid false reporting.
- *Farm Registration and Farm Organizations Funding Act, 1993:* OFA generally supports the proposed amendments to this act, but cautions that eliminating Section 2(2) could increase red tape and burden on farm businesses, and may result in multiple registrations filed for the same farm business.

To read our full submission to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, please visit ofa.on.ca/resources and click on "Submissions and Correspondence".

The growing need for natural gas

If you've read any material from OFA, you know that natural gas is a hot button for the 38,000 Ontario farm families we represent. Energy is a huge input cost on most farms, and yet one of the most affordable forms of energy – natural gas – is available to less than 20% of farm businesses.

OFA has been working with gas companies and the provincial government for the last few years to develop a fair and equitable way to install new natural gas infrastructure across rural Ontario. We're encouraged by the government's announcement last fall about the proposed *Access to Natural Gas Act* and will be advocating to ensure this new legislation includes full access to natural gas across rural Ontario.

Full access to natural gas requires a significant and long-term commitment by government. A 20-year program that invests \$75 million a year would have a huge impact.

- More competitive businesses
- More jobs and more taxpayers in rural areas
- New industry opportunities
- Stronger community infrastructure for schools and medical care
- Address climate change obligations



Itching to get on the land

It might be winter outside, but farmers across rural Ontario are busy getting ready to get back on the land for another growing season. Agriculture is waking up and getting ready for the year ahead. Farm sheds are bursting with bags of seed. There are farm shows and industry events to attend to catch up on the latest technology from suppliers, specialists and neighbours. And calving and lambing seasons are underway, bringing new life to the farm. If Mother Nature cooperates, you'll start to see farmers planting their crops in late April and early May.

COMING EVENTS

Learn more about Ontario's agri-food industry at these events

**OFA breakfast meeting:
PC caucus**
March 6, 2019

**OFA breakfast meeting:
NDP caucus**
March 7, 2019

**London
Farm Show**
March 6-8, 2019

**Ottawa Valley
Farm Show**
March 12-14, 2019

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