

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
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

You didn't have to look far outside your own neighbourhood to know that spring was a wet and unpredictable season this year. For Ontario agriculture, that posed some unique challenges for getting our crops in the ground so our next growing season could get going. By now, you should be seeing our efforts in the greening fields across rural Ontario.

Our spring issue of *From the Field* provides an overview of the work we've been doing to advocate for our 38,000 Ontario farm family members. Our job is to be their voice on legislation and regulations that impact their farm business operations. In turn, we are working to ensure continued sustainability and prosperity for the entire province's agri-food sector and our rural communities.

It's been a busy spring at Queen's Park too. And that means OFA has been wading through a number of legislative changes to provide formal submissions and feedback on files including the environment, animal protection, endangered species and farm labour. We've included highlights from our submissions in this issue.

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 throughout the summer months at events in your ridings, and at our annual OFA Field Day event in August.

Take a tour through Gwillimdale Farms with OFA.
See page 4 for event info.

Curbing unwanted farm visitors

There's a troubling trend on farm properties across the province — trespassers. Some may be "harmless" hikers or ATV drivers who detour off a local trail and trample crops. But the bigger, more concerning occurrence is uninvited activists who wantonly trespass and invade private property, breaking into barns and harassing farmers, their families and employees.

Agriculture has worked really hard over the last number of years to open up their doors to the public, to share the stories of their farms and families — and talk about their passion for animals, crops and the environment. But the trouble with trespassers is causing

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Mental health strategies needed for agriculture sector

Mental wellness on the farm is gaining momentum as the industry draws attention to the impact silent suffering has on the health of our farms, families and rural communities. The federal government recently released a new report, *Mental Health – A Priority for our Farmers*, based on a six-month study conducted last year on the mental health challenges facing Canadian producers.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conducted the study, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) was among many agricultural organizations that provided input to the committee last fall. In the report, the Standing Committee provided 10 recommends for the federal government to consider – actions aimed at breaking down the isolation and stigma farmers face when it comes to mental health. The individual recommendations address much needed action items, and collectively they provide a road map for long-term planning and investing in mental health initiatives and services for agriculture.

The stressors are nothing new to the agricultural community – the risks and uncertainties that come from weather, environmental challenges, market fluctuations, debt and regulations, and the stigma that prevents many from seeking help. But the lack of support and services available to help farmers cope with these stressors, and the added amplification from negative commentary on farming through social media, means farmers are far more vulnerable to mental health problems compared to the general public.

The report recommendations cover farm labour, regulatory changes, harassment and cyber bullying by activists, e-health services, mental health training and development of a national research centre on agricultural mental health.

These recommendations support and align with initiatives that OFA has been advocating for over recent years. The need for high-speed internet across rural Ontario would support e-service options for mental health. Whenever the government considers regulatory changes, the impact on the agriculture sector must be fully considered. And as the incidence of on-farm trespassing and harassment continues by activists, a recommendation to elevate cyber bullying and intimidation to a Criminal Code offense.

OFA will be following this file closely to track the progress of these recommendations by the federal government. Our work to bring awareness of this important health issue and realize OFA's recommendations outlined in the report isn't over yet. Many of the recommendations fall within the federal jurisdiction, while others will need to be addressed at the provincial level.

Changes to *Endangered Species Act* through the ag lens

A number of the proposed changes to the 10-year review of the *Endangered Species Act* impact Ontario farmers who deal with the habitats of endangered, threatened and species of concern that are on or around their farms. OFA presented a formal response to the government's call for submissions on the changes, and we must ensure any and all changes are examined through the filter of the impact on Ontario farms, businesses and the environment.

OFA has been actively involved in this legislation and participated in the consultations that led to the first *Endangered Species Act* in 2007. This legislation is designed to identify species at risk, protect their habitats and promote stewardship practices that will help protect these plant and animal species.

Here are the areas that OFA is watching closely in the proposed changes, as they impact our farm members.

- Assessing species at risk
- Implementing habitat protection
- Issuing permits
- Developing exemptions
- Enforcement of the *Endangered Species Act*

OFA's full submission on the 10-year review of the *Endangered Species Act* is available at ofa.on.ca – go to *Resources and Submissions & Correspondence*.



Making agri-food and rural matter more

To operate sustainable farms in Ontario, farmers rely on services and support from government just like any other business. But there are also unique needs for agricultural businesses and our rural communities that require all levels of government to step up with greater investments in our sector. Supporting our sector delivers very clear benefits of greater economic growth, a more competitive market and prosperity for all Ontarians. But we need a coordinated commitment from all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal.

As campaigning begins for the fall federal election, OFA will be advocating for many of the same issues that we talk to MPPs about as outlined in our ongoing **Producing Prosperity in Ontario** campaign. And we depend on provincial and federal elected officials to work together to deliver efficient and effective services to ensure our agri-food sector continues to drive the provincial economy.



Here are the issues we continue to talk about with all politicians.

-  **Rural Ontario needs affordable energy.**
-  **Well maintained roads, bridges and drainage systems that keep our industry moving.**
-  **Reliable high-speed internet to support farms and rural communities.**
-  **Markets for our agri-food products depend on smart regulations and a skilled, local workforce.**

We're encouraging our 38,000 farm members to talk to local candidates and be sure that the importance of our agri-food sector and rural communities are on the minds of the candidates we choose on October 21.

For more information, visit producingprosperity.ca and watch our short video on OFA's priorities for the 2019 federal election at [YouTube/OntarioFarms](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8).

Changes to animal care enforcement services

The provincial government and the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) have agreed to extend the animal care enforcement services until June 28, 2019 for domestic pets only. As of April 1, local police services are now responsible for inspection and enforcement activities for all livestock and equine in Ontario.

OFA and Ontario's animal agriculture industry have been working to develop networks with police forces across the province that have the authority to inspect premises and enforce animal care laws.

Ontario farmers provide excellent care for farm animals and uphold the highest standard of care as outlined in our national codes of practice. OFA is committed to working closely with police services in the continued best interest of our farm animals.

EBR activity report

OFA's farm policy research team contribute to our overall mandate to advocate and support sustainable farm businesses with their work on legislative and regulatory changes. They regularly provide background and recommendations for OFA's Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) submissions. Here are the EBR submissions OFA has been working on this spring.

ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2015

OFA supports the proposed changes to the In-Demand Stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nomination Program and we support efforts that will allow Temporary Foreign Workers as an easier pathway to becoming a permanent part of the Ontario labour force. We support the principle of providing jobs for Canadians first, and also recognize the need for foreign labour to fill a significant and ever-increasing shortfall in farm labour. Our sector depends on the Temporary Foreign Workers program.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ACT

OFA is concerned that the potential impact on agricultural lands and businesses will be overlooked by exempting the proposed "lowest-risk" categories from

an environmental assessment, as outlined in the government's "Modernizing Ontario's environmental assessment program". Any environmental assessment must include a separate Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) when a project has the potential to impact agriculture. We also recommend that all AIAs must include consultation with the impacted agricultural community.

DEVELOPMENT CHARGES ACT, 1997

OFA supports higher urban densities that help protect Ontario farmland. With only 5% of Ontario's landbase suitable for agriculture – and the fact that soil is irreplaceable – we must protect all of our productive land and soil for food production.

Developmental charges can be used as a financial incentive to help keep farmland in production. OFA requests the *Development Charges Act* be amended to include a province-wide exemption for farm buildings and structures from all development charges.

For more information on any of our EBR submissions, visit ofa.on.ca – go to *Resources* and *Submissions & Correspondence*.

REGISTER NOW

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added stress to farmers – a group that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food have recognized as being more vulnerable to stress and mental health problems than the general population.

Added to the stress is the reluctance of the legal system to prosecute offenders, leaving farmers feeling unprotected.

OFA is asking for stronger enforcement of activists who are conducting illegal and threatening activities. It's not just about personal safety. Break-ins can compromise biosecurity for livestock operations, putting animals at greater risk of disease.

By now, you may have received a personal letter from concerned farmers in your constituency through OFA's letter writing campaign on animal activism. More than 700 Ontario farmers sent letters to their MPP expressing their concerns and urging greater protection for Ontario farm families and their operations.



OFA's 2019 Field Day

Thursday, August 15

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Gwillimdale Farms
2026 – 11th Line, Bradford, ON**

This exclusive event for Ontario MPPs and their staff includes a unique opportunity to visit an innovative and progressive Ontario farm, visit with farmers and OFA representatives, and learn about what drives our provincial agri-food industry.

Gwillimdale Farms grow carrots, potatoes, beets, onions and parsnips. They pack and store all their produce on-farm and ship the vegetables all over Ontario. On the tour,

you'll learn about what it takes to grow, package and deliver the freshest, highest quality vegetables to Ontario consumers.

This outdoor event includes:

- Tour of a vegetable processing, packing and storage facility
- Delicious lunch featuring locally-sourced ingredients
- Opportunity to learn firsthand about Ontario's agri-food sector

Visit **OFAFieldDay.ca** for more information. Space is limited, RSVP to **fieldday@ofa.on.ca** by August 2, 2019.

This event is open to MPPs and their staff.

Slow down. Share the road.

Spring is one of the busiest times in agriculture. There is more farm equipment on the road travelling from field to field, and farm to farm, to get this year's crop in the ground. Have you ever been stuck behind a big tractor on a paved road, impatiently waiting for the chance to race past? Were you muttering under your breath and wondering why it was on your road, slowing you down?

When farm equipment shares the road with other drivers, the situation can be dangerous without a little mutual understanding. To give drivers a little insight into what to do around "slow moving" farm equipment, OFA created a short video this spring about slow moving vehicles.

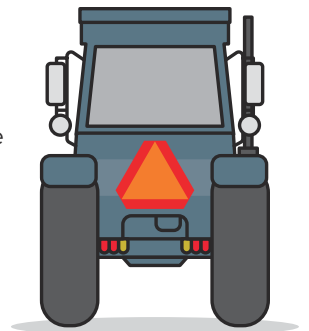
Have you ever noticed the bright orange and red triangle on the back of a tractor? It's a slow moving vehicle sign and it must be

displayed on farm equipment. It's there to let other drivers know that the vehicle is travelling slower than most traffic.

If you end up behind a slow moving vehicle, here are a few safety tips:

- Take a deep breath.
- When the path is clear, make sure the driver can see you before you pass.
- Don't expect the vehicle to pull over on the shoulder – it could be dangerous for a large piece of equipment.
- Slow down and share the road.

Watch our slow moving vehicle video at **YouTube/OntarioFarms**



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.

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