

FROM THE FIELD

From our field to yours – timely information for MPPs and MPs about Ontario's agri-food sector, from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.



Keith Currie
President
Ontario Federation
of Agriculture

FROM THE PRESIDENT

This new decade brings great new opportunities for Ontario's agri-food industry and our rural communities. As the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture – a 38,000-member strong farm organization – it's exciting to represent the powerhouse of the provincial economy, and a sector that makes tremendous contributions to the prosperity of all Ontarians.

We first launched this newsletter more than six years ago as a vehicle to share timely and relevant news to Ontario's MPPs about the issues the agri-food sector is facing, and the advocacy work OFA does on behalf of our members. With this Winter 2020 issue, we are expanding the reach of *From the Field* to include MPs in Ontario as many of the regulatory and legislative issues we deal with are governed by provincial and federal legislation.

Over the last several months, there have been encouraging announcements from government on files that OFA is tracking – many of these align with issues covered in our ongoing *Producing Prosperity in Ontario* campaign. I encourage you to pour a fresh cup of coffee and take a few minutes to read through these four pages. You'll find highlights/reactions to legislative announcements and issues we have been working on – from natural gas to broadband, trespassing and rural infrastructure investments.

Thank you for taking some time to understand the issues that impact the strength, sustainability and prosperity of Ontario's agri-food industry and our rural communities. And thank you for the positive action we've seen by all levels of government of the last several months.



Life made better with Bill 156

When the provincial government introduced Bill 156 – *Security from Trespass and Protecting Farm Safety Act, 2019* on December 2, 2019, the agricultural community breathed a collective sigh of relief that there would finally be real repercussions for unwanted trespassers and activists that show up on farm property. Almost as quickly as the proposed new Bill was announced, the vocal opposition from some special interest groups suggested the legislation would somehow hide how Ontario farm families produce food for Ontarians.

We appreciate the support from the provincial government for taking a strong stance to protect our farms and food safety for Ontarians.

OFA quickly took the offensive and put together an online campaign to show our support for Bill 156 and thank MPPs who had worked hard on bringing this new legislation to life. We wanted our voices to be heard

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OFA pre-budget highlights

Every year, as the provincial government puts together the annual budget, OFA provides a pre-budget submission to highlight the priority areas for investments in the agri-food industry. On January 17, we presented our budget priorities to the Ontario Legislative Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, as part of the committee's pre-budget hearings.

OFA strongly recommends the province of Ontario invest public funds to build rural infrastructure. We understand the need for fiscal restraint. We also understand that the economy of Ontario is intrinsically linked to the well-being of our rural communities. Our submission focused on investments needed for the agriculture sector and our rural communities to keep powering the provincial economy.

Our overarching message is the need for significant and sustained infrastructure investments in rural Ontario. OFA recommends the Ontario government work with municipalities across rural Ontario to develop and adopt a cost-effective infrastructure program – including roads, bridges, drainage and broadband – and provide core funding to rural municipalities to implement the program.

NATURAL GAS –

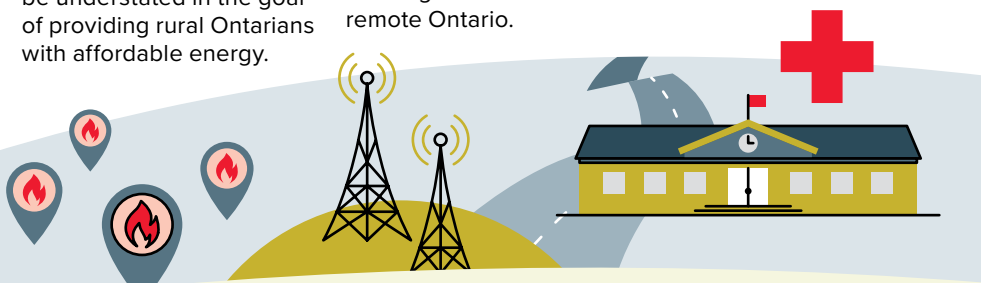
OFA appreciates the adoption of Bill 32, *Access to Natural Gas Act, 2018*, and the government's recognition of the value of providing reliable, accessible and economical energy across rural Ontario. There are some aspects of the Bill that we would like to address, and have outlined those in detail in our submission to Minister Phillips. The importance of continued public investment in natural gas infrastructure cannot be understated in the goal of providing rural Ontarians with affordable energy.

BROADBAND –

OFA is encouraged by the provincial government's \$315 million investment in broadband and cellular expansion over the next five years. OFA continues to actively petition the federal government to roll out a broadband access plan that meets the needs of 21st century customers in rural areas. We urge the province to join this campaign to facilitate reliable internet and cellular coverage across rural and remote Ontario.

SCHOOLS AND RURAL CARE –

Social infrastructure investments will ensure we can attract and retain employees in our rural communities by providing rural schools and quality health care. We need a concurrent investment in physical and social infrastructure to give families the opportunities to look to rural Ontario as an affordable and ideal place to work, live, play and invest.



OFA also provided recommendations on a number of the government's pre-budget consultation themes. These themes covered a broad range of topics including making life more affordable, creating a more competitive business environment, building healthier and safer communities, and establishing a collaborative, cooperative and efficient government.

It's time to adopt a new approach when it comes to infrastructure investments. We need a concerted effort by the government to boost our rural economy through a planned program of investment by distributing economic development around the province. When we support economic growth, including in our rural communities, we increase tax revenue, reduce government dependency and benefit all Ontarians, not just those living in rural areas.

Read OFA's full pre-budget submission – January 17, 2020 to Minister Phillips – at ofa.on.ca under "Resources" then "Submission and Correspondence."

Sound investments in rural Ontario will jump-start farming, agribusiness and rural Ontario growth, and in turn, stimulate the entire Ontario economy.



Conservation authority consultations

We recently provided input to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks as part of its multi-stakeholder consultations on conservation authorities in Ontario. Most of the 38,000 farm families OFA represents live and farm in municipalities where Ontario's 36 conservation authorities exercise their mandate, including activities impacting our farm businesses.

It is essential that conservation authorities recognize that agricultural land in Ontario provides two categories of "services" that benefit all Ontarians – food, fibre and fuel, plus a broad range of environmental ecological goods and services. These other services are often overlooked and include things like flood management, improved air quality (oxygen production, carbon sequestration, climate regulation), nutrient cycling, pollinator habitat, erosion control, and habitat for wildlife and species at risk.

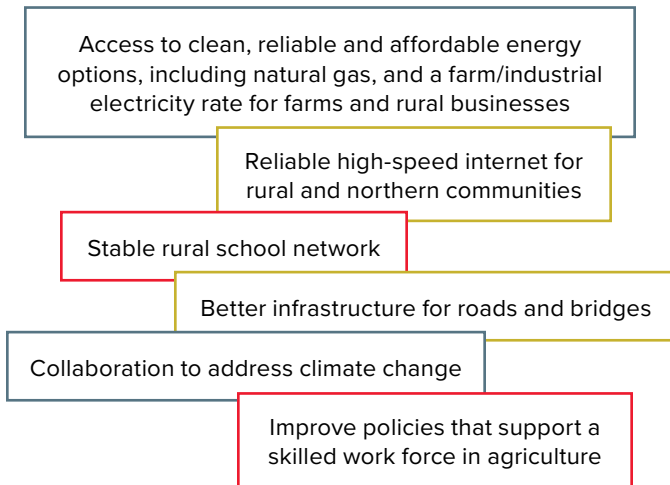
OFA supports the important role of conservation authorities in flood management. There is, however, some ambiguity in terminology contained in Section 28 of the *Conservation Authority Act* when it comes to watercourses and wetlands. OFA recently reiterated our longstanding call for the Ontario government to define key Section 28 terms, specifically "development activity", "watercourse and wetlands", "interference with a wetland" and "conservation of land".

We also recognize there are discrepancies in revenue potential among Ontario's conservation authorities and believe the provincial government must ensure all conservation authorities have the financial capacity to fulfill their core mandates.

We look forward to continuing the discussion about the vital role conservation authorities have across the province, in many of our agricultural regions, and how to ensure the interests and ideas from farmers and our rural communities are considered in any legislative changes.

OFA's 2020 priorities

OFA has identified several key areas to focus our government advocacy in 2020. We'll be collaborating with all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal – to ensure the interests of the agri-food sector and our rural communities are included, consulted and considered with any new and changing legislation.



ADVOCACY UPDATE: POSITIVE CHANGES MADE FOR AGRICULTURE

OFA has focused a lot of its advocacy efforts on key issues and priorities within the Producing Prosperity in Ontario campaign. We've seen some great progress at the legislative level over the last year.

- ✔ We're encouraged by announcements on expanding reliable internet to rural and northern communities, and we'll continue to push the federal government for a broadband access plan.
- ✔ The new Natural Gas Expansion Support Program (NGESP) is a positive initiative, and must be part of a long-term, phased approach to bring natural gas to rural, northern and Indigenous communities.
- ✔ A commitment of \$200 million for infrastructure investments to repair roads, bridges, water and wastewater in rural and northern communities, as well as planned updates to the *Drainage Act*.
- ✔ Removal of the *Line Fences Repeal Act, 2019*.
- ✔ Introduction of Bill 156, the new *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, 2019* that will increase protection for farms, families and our food supply.
- ✔ Introduction of Bill 136, the new *Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019* is a welcome change to provincial animal welfare enforcement in Ontario.

On the federal front

Starting with this issue of *From the Field*, we are extending our distribution to Ontario MPs. On the federal front, here are two of the areas we are working on – in conjunction with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture because these issues are impacted by provincial and federal government decisions.

FITTING AG IN THE FEDERAL CARBON POLLUTION PRICING SYSTEM

Canadian agriculture continues to make important headway in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, doing their part to address climate change. When it comes to moving towards cleaner energy options, there are inherently more choices available in urban centres including public transit networks. In rural Ontario, and in our farm businesses, we have much less access to clean, affordable alternatives.

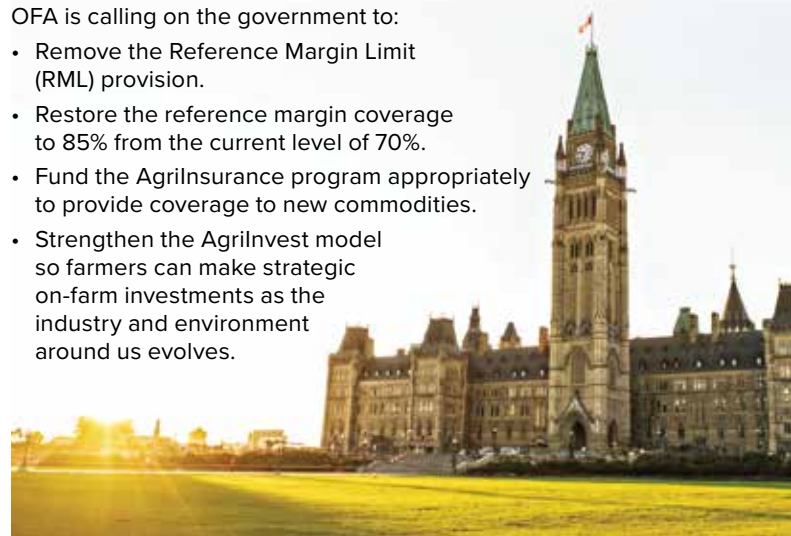
OFA is calling on the federal government to review its approach to the Federal Carbon Pollution Pricing System and the exemptions available for agriculture. We need government to work with our sector to reduce fossil fuel-based carbon emissions. The results that are attainable in urban centres to reduce fossil fuel consumption are not attainable for rural and northern region areas where we don't have alternative choices to reduce fossil fuel use. Agriculture's role in combatting climate change should not be understated. When adequately supported, on-farm conservation efforts provide a vast array of environmental benefits. The current carbon pricing model cannot drive conservation efforts on farms. It only serves to reduce already thin farm margins across the country as increased costs cannot be passed along to the consumer.

CHANGES NEEDED TO BRM SUITE OF PROGRAMS

In Ontario, Business Risk Management (BRM) programs are intended to help farmers manage risks that are beyond their control. The program is funded by the provincial and federal government through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, and the BRM suite of programs are in need of immediate and long-term improvements. There are growing global challenges to farm income that qualify as being beyond farmers' control – including trade disputes and market volatility. OFA continues to work with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to advocate for immediate long term improvements to existing BRM programs that should be fully funded and bankable for Canadian farmers.

OFA is calling on the government to:

- Remove the Reference Margin Limit (RML) provision.
- Restore the reference margin coverage to 85% from the current level of 70%.
- Fund the AgrilInsurance program appropriately to provide coverage to new commodities.
- Strengthen the AgrilInvest model so farmers can make strategic on-farm investments as the industry and environment around us evolves.



JOIN US FOR BREAKFAST

The dates are set for our annual spring breakfasts with provincial government caucus members. We serve up a hearty, hot breakfast along with casual conversations about the opportunities and potential our agri-food sector and rural communities have to deliver prosperity for the provincial economy.

Watch for your invitation to these events. We hope you can join us.

PC CAUCUS BREAKFAST

Tuesday,
March 3, 2020

7:30 - 9:00 a.m.
Queen's Park –
Government Caucus
Boardroom

NDP CAUCUS BREAKFAST

Wednesday,
March 4, 2020

7:30 - 9:00 a.m.
Queen's Park –
Government Caucus
Boardroom

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and our industry to be heard. Through our Act Now online platform (actnow.ofa.on.ca) we created a simple letter-writing campaign that by now, many of you have received a letter from. The campaign has resulted in more than 8,300 letters of support sent from individuals to their local MPP, voicing their support and reinforcing the need for Bill 156.

We appreciate the support from the provincial government for taking a strong stance to protect our farms and food safety for Ontarians, by introducing more significant consequences for illegal activist activities.

We continue to garner support for Bill 156 that will help ensure our farms are protected from the same type of illegal trespassing as any other citizen of the province expects on their own property. At a national level, OFA is putting forward a resolution at the upcoming Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) annual meeting to encourage CFA to lobby to improve and enforce federal legislation to address animal activist actions to further protect farmers, their families, their employees, their animals and farm-related activities.

New PAWS Act boosts accountability for animal care

On January 1, 2020, the new *Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act* came into effect for an updated, more uniform approach to delivering animal welfare enforcement in Ontario. The *PAWS Act* replaces the *Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* and is a welcome change to animal welfare enforcement in the province.

OFA worked closely with provincial livestock and poultry organizations, and government, to deliver this new animal protection model – one that carries the strongest penalties in Canada for anyone violating animal welfare laws.

The *PAWS Act* is good news for all Ontarians. Farmers are proud of the care they provide their animals. It's good news for agri-food industry partners who rely on our high standards of care as part of a safe value chain. And the general public can be assured our farm animals are safe, healthy and well cared for.

RESOURCE PRODUCTIVITY & RECOVERY AUTHORITY

OFA's concerns go unaddressed

OFA provided a detailed EBR submission in late 2019 to address proposed amendments to the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority's mandate to include digital reporting services for a wider range of waste and resource recovery programs.

We support improvements that are inherently designed to limit duplication of efforts, cut costs and streamline processes in urban centres. However, when it comes to rural and northern regions of the province – where broadband data and internet services are limited and/or unreliable – the ability to take advantage of streamlined services will be particularly challenging.

OFA recommended, in our formal submission, that areas where connectivity is not accessible or insufficient, traditional training and communications would still be required until reliable, consistent broadband, internet and cell service is available.

When the decision was announced in December 2019, OFA was disappointed to see that our concerns were not addressed.

"We have decided to change the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority's mandate to include digital reporting services....combining these services will save businesses time and money as a larger group of users will share costs and benefit from a modern registry."

OFA will continue to advocate for programs and services that reflect the needs of our members, including those in rural and northern regions that lack access to reliable connectivity.

Do you have questions about Ontario's agri-food sector or want to learn more about issues impacting our industry? Call OFA for insight and information.

Keith Currie, President

Ontario Federation of Agriculture
705.441.3362

Cathy Lennon, General Manager

Ontario Federation of Agriculture
519.821.8883