

October 7, 2020

Ms. Lorraine Dooley
Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
Culture Policy Unit
401 Bay Street, Suite 1800
Toronto, ON
M7A 0A7
(Submitted online via Environmental Registry of Ontario)

Dear Ms. Dooley:

Re: ERO # 019-1348 – Proposed Regulation under the *Ontario Heritage Act* (Bill 108)

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, proudly representing more than 38,000 farm family members across the province. OFA has a strong voice for our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. We are passionate and dedicated to ensuring the agri-food sector and our rural communities are included, consulted and considered in any new and changing legislation that impacts the sustainability and growth of our farm businesses.

Ontario's diverse and innovative agri-food sector is a powerhouse for the province – growing and producing more than 200 farm and food products, fuelling our rural communities and driving the provincial economy by generating more than 860,000 jobs and contributing over \$47 billion to Ontario's annual GDP. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses and their communities.

Ontario's prime agricultural land, the land upon on which we depend for safe, affordable food, fibre and fuel is a finite and shrinking resource. Although Ontario covers a vast land area, less than 5% of the province's land area is capable of supporting farming. Between the 2011 and 2016 censuses, the area being farmed in Ontario declined from 12,668,200 acres to 12,348,500 acres, equal to losing 175 acres per day, each day, for that five-year period. Given the projected population growth in Ontario, Canada and globally, we cannot afford to continue to lose our valuable agricultural land to non-agricultural uses and retain our capacity to feed ourselves.

In our 2019 comments on ERO # 019-0021; Schedule 11 of the *More Homes, More Choices Act, 2019*, amendment to the *Ontario Heritage Act*, we supported the amendments to set out the required content of heritage designation by-laws and to require notice to the property owner once their property has been listed, and to enable them to object to a proposed heritage designation.

At that time, we also recommended that agricultural buildings and agricultural landscapes be exempt from heritage designations. For some, their focus is on retaining old agricultural buildings, principally bank barns, on the landscape. We agree that they are imposing structures. But they are from a bygone era and simply do not suit the needs of 21st century farmers. They are outdated and inefficient. We cannot think of another sector of our economy that is asked/directed to operate in outdated and inefficient buildings.

Although not specifically addressed in the draft regulation, efforts to designate farm buildings, principally bank barns, as heritage buildings, along with efforts to designate agricultural landscapes as "heritage landscapes" are troubling for Ontario's farmers. Agriculture in Ontario has changed substantially over the last half century. Farms have become specialized with respect to the crops and/or livestock they produce. On farms no longer raising livestock or poultry, barns are redundant. On today's livestock and/or poultry

farms, traditional bank barns are obsolete. The building needs of 21st century livestock and/or poultry farms have evolved. Efforts to designate these old structures as “heritage buildings” poses an unfair burden on Ontario farm businesses. Unless constantly maintained at the farmer’s cost, old, unused buildings will eventually collapse, particularly when they are no longer used to house livestock or poultry. Getting insurance for unused barns is expensive, and some farm property insurance providers simply refuse to insure them. Forcing farmers to shoulder the costs and obligations of buildings that serve no day-to-day farm purpose is unrealistic. The OFA recommends that the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries exempt non-residential farm buildings from designation as heritage structures.

In addition, we know that some municipalities have endeavoured to include the broader view-scape or landscape around a potential heritage structure, to include the fields and farmlands beyond the designated property’s boundaries as a “heritage landscape”. Agriculture in Ontario is a very diverse activity. Over 200 different crops (grains, fruits, vegetables) and different types of livestock and poultry are grown or raised on Ontario farms. The needed farm buildings and structures to raise or grow these farm products changes along with requirements of the new crop or livestock. In response to changing market opportunities, farm businesses may commence or cease the production of specific crops or livestock. Designating an agricultural landscape as a “heritage landscape”, while well-meaning, traps farmers subject to this designation. This designation could block farm businesses from adopting new crop, livestock or poultry opportunities. The OFA recommends that the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries ensure that agricultural landscapes are also exempt from designation under the Act.

While we have no objections to designating a specific building, and the property it occupies as a property of cultural heritage value or interest, we are concerned because some municipalities have endeavoured to somehow “link” a specific property with a building of cultural heritage value or interest on it to the broader surrounding agricultural lands. The proponents have provided no acceptable rationale for such a linkage. Those farming the surrounding agricultural lands are rightly concerned by the implications of this, specifically its implications on normal farm practices and on a farmer’s ability to change the crops they grow or livestock they raise.

On behalf of our more than 38,000 farm family members across the province, I thank the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries for the opportunity to provide an agricultural perspective on the proposed Regulation under the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

Sincerely,



Keith Currie
President

KC/pj

cc: The Honourable Lisa MacLeod; Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
The Honourable Ernie Hardeman; Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
OFA Board of Directors