

Written Submission to Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Regarding consideration of Bill 39, *Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022*

**Submitted by the
Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Durham Region Federation of Agriculture
York Region Federation of Agriculture**

November 29, 2022

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Standing Committee Chair Laurie Scott, MPP
Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy
Whitney Block, Room 1405,
99 Wellesley Street W
Toronto, ON

Submitted Online

Dear Standing Committee Chair and Members:

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, proudly representing over 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.

The Durham Region Federation of Agriculture (DRFA) and York Region Federation of Agriculture (YRFA) are two of 51 county and regional federations across the province that are affiliates of the OFA. DRFA and YRFA represents the voice of agriculture in Durham and York Regions, and advocates on behalf of over 1100 and 600 farm families, respectively.

With DRFA and YRFA, we are pleased to provide a written submission containing our concerns in response to Bill 39, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001, and to enact the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Repeal Act, 2022.

Before providing comments concerning the changes, we must acknowledge that over half (52%) of Canada's prime soils are in Ontario and that farmland makes up less than 5% of Ontario's land base. Yet, from 2016 to 2021, the Census of Agriculture indicated that Ontario lost the equivalent of 319 acres a day. Further, between 2000 – 2017, southern Ontario lost more than 72,000 acres of prime agricultural land to Official Plan Amendments approved for urban development.¹ Given recent decisions over the last few weeks from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to expand the urban boundaries in several municipal Official Plans (i.e., Halton, Hamilton, Niagara, and Ottawa) by over 14,500 acres, we now know that the reported numbers of acres lost are an underestimation.

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 750,000 jobs and contributing over \$47 billion to Ontario's annual GDP. Agriculture and agri-food businesses must be able to invest in their

¹ Caldwell, Wayne, Sara Epp, Xiaoyuan Wan, Rachel Singer, Emma Drake, and Emily C. Sousa. "Farmland Preservation and Urban Expansion: Case Study of Southern Ontario, Canada." *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 6 (February 18, 2022): 777816. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.777816>.

operations and diversify their products with confidence that farmlands will be available. Ontario farmers cannot do so if provincial legislation is continuously used to pave over farmlands. Their ability to feed our province and economy relies on knowing that encroaching development will be limited and not hinder their ability to farm and remain viable into the future. Decision-makers must never lose sight of this reality when making decisions about the future agricultural land loss to development for housing, population, and employment growth.

When agricultural land is developed, it is lost forever. Ontario is losing some of its most productive agricultural land to pressures for urbanization and growth enabled by provincial policies and tools. If our province plans to continue to grow and prosper, we must also have the plan to protect Ontario's position to produce food, fibre and fuel for the people of this province and beyond.

OFA, DRFA, and YRFA are opposed to the repealing of the *Duffins Rouge Agricultural Protection Act (DRAPA)* to “assist in removing barriers to building much-needed housing.” DRAPA should remain intact.

Land within the DRAP consists mostly of Class 1 soils – Ontario's most productive, yet finite, agricultural land. The principle of the DRAPA was to ensure these agricultural lands are protected in perpetuity and to ensure “the conservation, preservation or protection of the land for agricultural purposes.” In 1999, the City of Pickering, Region of Durham, and the Province of Ontario sold the lands with easements to *permanently* protect the land for agricultural uses. To enhance these protections, the DRAPA was introduced in 2005 to hold the City of Pickering accountable for the protection of these lands. Also in 2005, DRAP was protected in the Greenbelt and under agricultural and natural heritage designations in the Central Pickering Development Plan. Lastly, the DRAP is protected by a Minister's Zoning Order (MZO) – a use of MZOs that OFA supports. Yet, all of these protections mean nothing if the province can scrap these protections at the stroke of a pen. The DRAP is a perfect example of protections to farmland that should be systematically evaluated and awarded to farmlands all across Ontario.

Further, the DRAP is part of a larger regional agricultural system creating a contiguously protected area, as it abuts the Rouge National Urban Park. Farmers depend on the availability of land in proximity to their operations to be able to farm more efficiently, safely, and viably.

OFA recognizes the need to construct more housing in Ontario and the provincial government's goal to create 1.5 million homes to meet projected population growth trends. However, we must also acknowledge that building homes and protecting farmland are both matters of provincial interest, and both are goals that Ontario need not treat as mutually exclusive.

OFA notes that the Housing Affordability Task Force has implored the provincial government to protect the Greenbelt, and that “a shortage of land isn't the cause of the problem. Land is available, both inside the existing built-up areas and on undeveloped land outside greenbelts.”² OFA, along with DRFA and YRFA, encourages the provincial government to listen to their experts and explore other avenues to address housing supply which do not sacrifice farmland.

We urge the provincial government to implement changes to build more homes faster that reflect that growth management to meet housing demand and farmland protection are two sides of the same coin. More robust protection against development on agricultural land combined with fixed,

² Housing Affordability Task Force, and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. “Report of the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force.” Queen's Printer for Ontario, February 8, 2022. <https://files.ontario.ca/mmah-housing-affordability-task-force-report-en-2022-02-07-v2.pdf>.

permanent urban boundaries and mandatory compliance with urban density and intensification requirements will achieve community development and farmland protection objectives.

We emphasize that there is only one Ontario landscape. The full range of urban, rural, agricultural, natural heritage, cultural heritage, and mineral extraction land uses across the provincial landscape must coexist in the same space. Intensification of residential development within the existing urban footprint, in the context of complete and liveable communities, along with the distribution of economic development province-wide, addresses housing needs. Intensification will boost economic growth, create new jobs, provide new affordable housing options, support municipal infrastructure systems, ensure food security, and contribute to environmental stewardship. These opportunities will reduce red tape, satisfy our need for sustainably and efficiently built housing that is both affordable and attainable, and attract economic investment.

OFA appreciates the opportunity to provide our feedback and agricultural perspectives on Bill 39. We look forward to working with the provincial government and our municipal counterparts to sustain our province's housing supply and communities while protecting our agricultural land base and supporting our agri-food sector as an economic powerhouse.

Sincerely,



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