

October 4, 2023

Hon. Graydon Smith
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
Whitney Block
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, ON
M7A 1W3

Submitted via email to minister.mnrf@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Graydon Smith,

Re: Release of Northern Ontario Crown Land for Agricultural Use

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), I am writing to request Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry develop agricultural policies and processes that support the timely release of Crown land for agricultural purposes in Northern Ontario.

OFA proudly represents more than 38,000 farm businesses across the province, supporting our members and the agriculture industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses and their communities.

OFA member delegates attending the OFA's Annual General Meeting held on November 21, 2022, passed a resolution calling for the development of agricultural policies and processes to enable the timely release of Crown land to individual farmers for the purposes of sustainable agricultural production.

Released in 2011, the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario recognized the value in growing and diversifying the agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector in Northern Ontario. In 2016, OFA was a supporter of the provincial government's Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy: Strengthening the Agriculture, Aquaculture and Food Sector. OFA was also pleased to see the Northern Livestock Pilot Action Plan enacted in 2016 to support the expansion of livestock farming in Northern Ontario in an environmental, social and sustainable way; however, the Plan was never fully enacted. Most importantly, resulting in the loss of establishing pilot sites to promote livestock expansion in the Great Clay Belt area using a low-density pasture-based farming system. OFA believes additional policy development toward this matter is in the best interest of all associated stakeholders. Our farmers take stewardship of agricultural lands as a serious responsibility by utilizing best management practices to mitigate environmental impact. Northern Ontario is well

positioned to take advantage of this economic development opportunity, which will not only benefit the provincial economy and individual farmers but strengthen our regional food systems and the sustainability of our communities.

In 2020, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) proposed to allow the disposition of Crown land for agriculture as a permitted use in identified areas between Hearst and Kapuskasing. A decision was made on January 13, 2023 to proceed with the minor amendment to the area-specific Crown land use policies for the Resource Utilization Area (G1729), the Aggregate Resource Area (G1731), the Fred Platt Aggregate Area (G1732), the Kapuskasing Resource Extraction Area (G1736) and the Highway Number 11 Corridor (G1737). OFA wholeheartedly supported the disposition of Crown land for agriculture as a permitted use in the identified areas between Hearst and Kapuskasing. Opening lands in this area for agriculture serves to bolster the local economy and increase local food.

OFA has identified many opportunities to support expansion of the agricultural sector in Northern Ontario, including the release of Crown land. While productive strides and commitments to support the sector have been made in recent years, there are still considerable challenges facing farmers looking to obtain Crown land for agricultural purposes. The *Applicant's Guide to applying for Crown land for agricultural purposes in Northern Ontario* was a welcomed guidance document that aimed to streamline the process. Ontario farmers were optimistic that this would expedite progress. However, it appears that there are still many hurdles to this process resulting in lengthy timelines, onerous paperwork, and rarely resulting in farmers' access to Crown land.

OFA looks forward to working with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Beef Farmers of Ontario, and other stakeholders to develop agricultural policies and processes that support the timely release of Crown land for agricultural purposes in Northern Ontario.

Sincerely,



Peggy Brekveld
President

cc: Hon. Lisa Thompson, Minister, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Jack Chaffe, President, Beef Farmers of Ontario
Frank Haasen, President, Cochrane Federation of Agriculture
Cindy Jansen, Administrator, Cochrane Federation of Agriculture
OFA Board of Directors
Stephanie Vanthof, Member Service Representative, OFA
Janine Lunn, Member Services Manager (Eastern & Northern Regions), OFA