

OFA – Policy Advisory Council (PAC) Meeting

August 6, 2025

Hybrid Meeting

Welcome & Introductions

Drew Spoelstra, President welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced co-chair Angela Field from the PAC Steering committee.

Interprovincial Trade Update

Drew Spoelstra provided updates on the interprovincial trade file since discussions at the April 2025 PAC meeting. Drew highlight that a joint letter with 23 commodity groups was sent to the Prime Minister and all Agriculture Ministers regarding industry concerns including interprovincial trade. The topic was also discussed at the meeting of the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Agriculture.

Several provincial governments across Canada signing agreements to strengthen interprovincial trade. Drew stated that provinces are recognizing that things need to change, this won't happen quickly. OFA has asked for a seat at the table for these discussions and that is happening.

PAC Land Use Survey

Duncan Goetze, OFA Farm Policy Analyst

Angela Field, PAC Steering Committee Member, informed the PAC that approximately 1/3 of PAC members completed the survey. This was disappointing and reminded PAC that their participation is valued and to keep this in mind when future participation is requested with surveys. Concerns about the time of year it was sent (Late May – early June), and the long length of survey were expressed.

Duncan Goetze reviewed the results of the survey. The survey covered the following topics:

- Locally Prime Agricultural Areas
- Spatial Separation Formulae
- The Greenbelt
- The Niagara Escarpment
- Natural Heritage
- Lot Creation
- General Comments

<https://ofa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/PAC-Survey-Ultralight.pdf>

Rural & Ag Land Designations

Duncan Goetze, OFA Farm Policy Analyst

Duncan overviewed several topics within Ontario's land use planning system, stating that it is diverse by design. Planning tools are tailored to local needs, including Zoning and Area Designations. Official Plans are time and money intensive to amend and Provincial Plans (NEP, GBP, ORMCP) are rarely amended.

Duncan reviewed three major areas in his presentation: Official Plans, Zoning By-laws and Crown/North.

In summary Duncan concluded that you should

1. Become familiar with your local planning system
2. Keep informed about what's being proposed
3. Stay connected with your local federation and community groups

<https://ofa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Rural-and-Agricultural-Land-Designation-presentation.pdf>

Agriculture Impact Assessments

Margaret Walton, Senior Planner, Planscape, Chair, Ontario Farmland Trust

Margaret stated that the power point presentation she provided is a resource for PAC to help understand the process.

<https://ofa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/AIA-Presentation-Final-OFA-PAC-Aug-06-2025-Margaret-Walton.pdf>

Topics covered in the resource document are:

- What is an Agricultural Impact Assessment?
- Provincial policy requirements
- Municipal Requirements
- Current status of resources
- AIA study content
- Measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts
- AIA Tenets

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) policy requires the following for re-designation of prime agricultural areas and for all non-agricultural uses in the prime agricultural area

- avoidance of specialty crop areas
- compliance with MDS
- demonstrated need
- evaluation of alternative locations that avoid prime agricultural areas or be located on lower priority agricultural lands
- impacts from any new or expanding non-agricultural uses on surrounding agricultural operations are to be mitigated to the extent feasible

AIAs are **required** by the Provincial Policy Statement for:

- settlement area boundary expansions
- mineral aggregate applications (also required by Aggregate Resources Act)
- infrastructure projects
- other non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural area

Recommended for:

- rural lands
- OMAFA's AIA guidance document provides useful ideas on how to avoid, minimize and mitigate the impact of development on agriculture

<https://ofa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/omafra-agricultural-impact-assessments-en-2024-04-03-DRAFT.pdf>

Margaret commented that the 2024 Provincial Policy Statement has made it easier to expand municipal boundaries.

AIA guidance document from OMAFRA has been in draft since 2028 – update version of guidelines may be available January 2026. Lots of changes are being made currently, and according to planners seems like a daily occurrence.

When an AIA is required, the following must be considered: avoidance of specialty crop areas, demonstrate a need and must evaluate the alternatives to avoid prime ag land is required. Other reports may be required such as planning and environmental reports. AIA's are completed by the proponent that are wanting the development.

Aggregate operations trump agriculture. Even if they extract on prime agricultural land. The land must be rehabilitated to its original state after the extraction, but this rarely happens or is enforced. Even though a rehabilitation plan was required to be filed with the AIA.

AIA's are peer reviewed, and any issues must be addressed. AIA are to encourage development and not meant to discourage it.

Questions:

1. Most of us farm class 4 and 5 land. We take 5 and 6 land and upgrade it. Why doesn't that process get recognized?

This is the message I try to convey; agriculture has progressed from the 50's and 60's. When the growth plan first came out, it mapped a system. I looked at candidate areas, lower class areas that were actively being farmed, the idea is moving forward as a system and not individual parcels. You need to keep an eye on it and ask it to be accelerated. Farmland Trust has asked for acceleration requests.

2. When municipalities create subdivisions. Why does the municipality not pay for their own AIAs not the developers?

There are not a lot of planners that specialize in agriculture within the process. Urban people have no idea about agriculture. I look at my associates that do AIA's they are close to retirement and need to get younger planners to do them.

3. Our municipal councilors are feeling pressure from the province to develop. What would it take to have the AIA get more teeth?

Economic information can resonate with councils. Look at Ontario's food processing industry and present the numbers. Solution for housing is in the boundaries. We can do higher density; everybody doesn't need an acre.

4. We recognize the importance of the presentation; however, we see Wilmot township 750 acres gone, St. Thomas 1500 acres gone, and a rumour that another 12 000 acres being take out by the province. Nothing seems to stop the loss of land.

If the citizens understand that 1% of land is prime land and it is the best land in the world it could make a difference. Get the message across to people. It can be simple messaging such as "You can't grow peaches up north", only in Niagara. By the equator food production in the future will stop and Canada will improve because we have water. The environmental lobby is strong, and, in your face, we need to get that message out there.

Revive Project Update

Halton/Hamilton-Wentworth/Niagara – Land Use Planning Workshop

Nancy Comber reported on a one-day training session on rural planning that was customized for their three boards using revive funds.

Training covered the fundamentals of land use planning in rural areas; legislative changes and a discussion of the challenges faced in participating in the land use process. There were 40 people in total that participated including Board of Directors and other key parties.

For other counties that may be interested in having a similar training day in their area contact Debbie Vandenakker at Planscape Inc. at (705) 645-1556.

Energy Installation on Prime Ag Land

Ian Nokes, OFA Farm Policy Analyst

Ian reiterated that AIA are good tools for municipalities to make informed decisions. AIA guidelines for IESO (Independent Electricity System Operator) procurements must contain the following

No Specialty Crop Area sites

No Ground-mounted solar in Prime Agriculture Areas, as designated by a municipal official plan.

Projects in Prime Agriculture Areas complete Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) to satisfaction of local municipality. Respect of agriculture to "avoid" impacts to agriculture where possible.

AIA process for IESO Projects proposed for Prime Agricultural Areas need to prove they evaluated alternative locations in their proposal submission, to the satisfaction of the local

municipality; and if selected, prior to construction, projects need to provide the full AIA to satisfaction of local municipality.

In conclusion, a municipality may set the elements of agriculturally-integrated projects related to project type, complexity and scale, and anticipated magnitude of impacts.

Avoiding Prime Agricultural Areas may not be feasible for projects which are inextricably linked to agriculture and therefore the process for evaluating alternative locations could be streamlined.

If an integrated project is locally exempt from evaluation of alternative locations, it must still demonstrate the need to co-locate with a farm operation and/or locate in a PAA.

Need is linked to an operational relationship between energy project and agricultural use.

Agriculturally-integrated projects (i.e., biogas, biomass, or combined heat and power facilities), may be mutually-beneficial or integrated relationship with agriculture by utilizing agricultural source material (e.g., input/feedstock dependent);and/or, generating byproducts such as soil amendments, heat or CO₂ that are primarily utilized by surrounding farm operations

Questions:

1. Wind turbine companies west of New Liskeard are looking to put up turbines. What happens at the end of the contract and who is responsible for decommissioning them after 25 years?

Those that are coming up or are at end of contract can apply for medium procurement with the IESO for another 20 -30 years, they may need a new turbine or tower. The proponent must have enough funds in trust to do a decommission in the end. A turbine could be just taking the turbine down; they will not remove the concrete that is 20 feet deep in the ground.

2. Why would the IESO consider more wind turbines? Are they going to start the micro fit for solar and renew them?

3. *These are totally new. Any FIT contracts at least 1 megawatt and connecting to the transmission line, can enter a medium contract and line up to go to long term. You as a landowner, it is up to you if they can extend it.*

4. Biogas installations, and Hydro One or OPG connect biogas to the grid?

Yes, the challenge is Hydro one for example, it is getting too bureaucratic and time consuming. We have a resolution to advocate that and will work with IESO.

Break Out Session

Groups were asked to discuss regional official plans with the following questions as a starting point to the discussions: Does your region have an official plan and has your local federation commented on the plan or status of the plan?

Summary of Group discussions:

<https://ofa.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Summary-of-Group-Discussions-at-August-6-PAC-meeting.pdf>

OFA President Update

Drew stated that it's been a busy summer, and a lot of our work continues to focus on some of the trade challenges that our country is faced with today. As it currently stands, we continue to have CUSMA in place and compliant products trade back and forth tariff free. We do have significant tariffs on steel and aluminum, lumber and autos and additional retaliatory tariffs which are increasing costs of products coming into Canada for some. It remains a very volatile situation, and we continue to look for a good deal not any deal.

Provincial Engagement

On going work around land use issues, development of AIA's, challenges with Bill 5.

Support for Farm Belt Bill (Schreiner/ Brady) designed to protect prime farmland from non agriculture uses in the future.

Continued engagement with the Ministry of Energy on growth plans, gas expansion, renewables, highlighting needs for rural Ontario and concerns about farmland usage and project development.

Municipal Engagement

Appreciate all the good work going on with individual municipalities and your county federations. We're certainly aware of a number of challenges with land use changes in Simcoe county, prince Edward, Lambton, Halton, Hamilton, Waterloo, Elgin, Middlesex, Ottawa and many other areas, and its difficult to stay on top of all of them but partnering with your federations certainly helps us - help you in contributing to the process of these boundary expansions and protecting vulnerable ag lands.

Lots of good member engagement and municipal engagement opportunities across county federations, some through revive fund programming and its been great to see and participate in many cases. I wanted to highlight a tour hosted by the Manitoulin federation last week where they welcomed the team from OMAFA and it was great to hear some feed back from them on the tour across the north. We're also organizing some additional tours for MP's and Mpp's over the next few weeks while they continue to engage in their communities on an extended break from the legislature.

Federal Engagement

Encouraged by messaging from the government about the focus on growth in the sector, agricultural processing investments, removal of consumer carbon tax, pulling back on the capital gains taxation policies and changes to BRM programming for this year as agreed to by the majority of provinces. Lots of discussions to continue with the new Minister MacDonald and the new team in the Prime Minister Office to ensure that policy creation going forward has a lens that benefits agriculture and recognizes the opportunities within the sector.

Earlier this year, we spearheaded a coordinated communications effort among Ontario's agricultural organizations to draw attention to both the challenges and the growth potential tied to trade, tariffs, and domestic policy. It was a proactive push to ensure government is not only hearing from us—but hearing a consistent, united message.

We've encouraged the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to carry that same spirit of collaboration across the national stage. The message to the federal government is clear: agriculture is one of the country's greatest economic powerhouses. With the right tools—smart policy, modern infrastructure, and thoughtful regulation—we can unlock even more potential. We've seen through various events including our recent commodity leader social evening that Farm leaders across Ontario are ready to partner with decision-makers to build that future, together.

Through these efforts we're often reminded that collaboration isn't a buzzword—it's a strategy. We must continue to walk the walk and if we want Ontario and Canadian agriculture to reach its full potential both here at home and globally, we need to keep showing up, speaking out, and working together.

Of course, not many of all these things I've reported on happen on their own and most of them involve Cathy Lennon in some capacity and I'd like to congratulate her on recently being named a 2025 influential woman in Canadian agriculture.

County and Commodity Updates/Emerging Issues

Kent County

Roundabout Design

Concerns of rural roundabout design. We have a big issue with Highway 2 entrances to roundabout from all four roads are not wide enough, it is a single lane all the way through, hard to use the aprons, and obstacles including rock, light stations and fire hydrants. Need help with clear guidelines for provincial consistency.

Calculation of Permit Fees

Building permits and how they are calculated need more consistency between counties on how the fees are calculated. Chatham-Kent has no cap.

Bio-Security Training

Bio security training for municipal employees, incident where an employee went onto a farm without knowledge of bio security standards. Need to find a way to educate municipal employees about on farm.

Renfrew

District Health Unit

District health unit has taken it upon themselves to interpret provincial rules in own manner. Only two farmers markets are currently open due to the health unit inspector stating that the other farm markets do not qualify. If you look at other health units in the province they are not interpreting the rules in the same way as Renfrew. Producers are afraid to speak out because they may be targeted and shut down. Ag economic development committee to help with this. We would appreciate assistance and feedback from other counties if you have had to deal with this issue.

Christmas Tree Farmers of Ontario (new commodity member with OFA in 2025)

Shirley Brennan, Executive Director, provided the following summary of challenges in their industry.

- **Climate change is already impacting Canada's Christmas tree sector** through increased seedling mortality, shifting growing conditions, and rising pest and disease pressures—yet these risks remain largely unaccounted for in agricultural policy frameworks.
- **Christmas tree farms contribute meaningfully to Canada's climate goals** by sequestering carbon, supporting biodiversity, and sustaining low-impact, perennial agriculture—yet they are excluded from most climate and carbon financing programs.
- Without formal recognition and inclusion in climate adaptation strategies, insurance programs, and carbon markets, **Christmas tree growers lack the tools and resources needed to respond to intensifying environmental challenges.**
- Existing **partnerships between growers, conservation authorities, and research institutions** demonstrate how the industry is already contributing to ecological restoration, circular economies, and local climate resilience.
- **Protecting the future of Christmas tree farming means supporting it as both a cultural tradition and a climate solution**—one that strengthens rural economies while advancing federal, provincial, and municipal climate commitments.
- **Communication around getting information out to affiliated OFA tree farmers who are not a member of the CTFO.** This would be a valuable strategy to create awareness
- **Christmas tree buyer demographics including socioeconomic factors, regional trends, age groups, cultural and economic backgrounds** As these demographics continue to shift, an important question arises: how do we ensure that we remain relevant to evolving consumer groups?

These are promising areas for future focus and could lead to meaningful growth and adaptation for our organization.

Adjournment