

78,000 Ontario farmers call for an end to urban sprawl

By Marni Walsh

Over 52,000 farms and 78,000 farmers have a united message for the Provincial Government: freeze urban boundaries now and stop urban sprawl to protect farmland in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH).

This includes Melancthon farmer Ralph Armstrong who says, "It is important to keep the message out there that farmland is limited. If we protect it, the land will feed us every year."

Ralph Armstrong is a sixth generation farmer who was one of the first to sound the alarm regarding the manoeuvres of the Highland Companies' land acquisitions of Honeywood farmland as the hedge fund corporation prepared to apply for a 2,400 acre open pit mine on the headwaters and first class prime farmland.

Worried about the future of food and water that we are leaving our children, Ralph says he believes we must all speak for them now.

"If you were to ask me as a five year old, will you leave me a secure supply of food and water for the rest of my life?" he says, "That would be a better inheritance than money."

Norm Ragetlie, Chair of the Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT) says, "We are at a unique moment in history where there is an opportunity for the province to demonstrate real leadership in growth planning by enacting meaningful limits on urban expansion."

"The province's population growth projection of 4.5 million new residents by 2041 is being used by developers to argue that more farmland should be designated for urban uses in the GGH," says the OFT. "However, independent research by the Neptis Foundation and others shows that more land for urban development in the region is not needed, with an excess of 25 years' worth of farmland already designated by municipalities to accommodate growth in both urban and rural settlement areas."

Matt Setzkorn Manager of Land Programs & Policy for [Ontario Farmland Trust](#) (OFT) notes, "The province's recently proposed changes to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and Greenbelt Plan fail to protect the majority of farmers and farmlands in the region from ongoing and poorly-planned urban sprawl."

Farming organizations like OFT are concerned that "the proposed new policy reinforces and enables status quo sprawl, making it difficult to see a future for local food and farming in the region."

Collaborative efforts have been made by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and fifteen other agriculture organizations calling for stronger provincial leadership on farmland preservation. This includes the Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT), Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CCFO), National Farmers Union-Ontario, and the Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance.

"First and foremost, because we need to be forward thinking about our food supply and protect that which is irreplaceable," says Shirley Boxem, Chair of Food and Water First. "Our food system needs to be as local as possible, so as to be resilient against the changing markets and climate conditions around the globe. We have some of the best food producing land in the world right here in Ontario and must not squander this unique and precious resource."

OFA President Keith Currie says he believes, "Hard municipal growth boundaries must be part of the solution to supporting agriculture in the GGH so we don't pave over the region's farmland and displace more farm families and farming communities."