

NDACT represented at World Congress of Rural Sociology

By Marni Walsh

The International Rural Sociology Association (IRSA) conference was hosted by Ryerson University in Toronto last month and Mulmur resident Carl Cosack was there to represent the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) and the Food and Water First movement.

Held every four years in different places around the world, the conference hosts delegates from many countries with keynote speakers, such as Mr. Cosack, delivering dialogue on 'fresh, integrative insights and challenges for rural sociological inquiry and practice.'

Mr. Cosack, says he was 'proud to have represented NDACT and Food and Water First with a presentation and panel discussion.'

He was joined by Pickering's **Land Over Landings'** representative Mary Delaney on a panel entitled: **Linking Toronto with Region and Rural: Pathways, Politics and Prospects.**

It was the 14th World Congress of Rural Sociology, with a mandate to encourage 'interdisciplinary dialogue, exchange and collaboration' in order to enhance and improve 'the life conditions and experiences of people located in, identified with, and concerned about, rural places and communities worldwide.'

Carl participated in other workshops at the conference before his own session, and says he was struck by 'how intense the overall concern is about nation's abilities to grow their own food.'

'Delegates from Norway and the Netherlands stated that 'rezoning' of farmland was a non-starter in Europe - it just was not going to happen,' he says. 'A lawyer from Australia stated that fracking, as unregulated as it seems to be there, was ruining the 'food productive' value of the land above, creating huge regulatory holes and leaving landowners completely exposed. Like Canadians, landowner rights are not enshrined in the constitution and multinational companies own the rights to the resources below.'

'Delegates from Asian nations are worried about their government's ability to feed their ever growing populations. Where is all that food going to come from? They are very envious of Canada, which is able to grow so much of its own food and still export to contribute to the nation's GDP.'

Other concerns included, 'how all this rural economic activity feeds and supports the necessary 'rural' sociology; how rural voters are insignificant in many parts of the world, yet they feed and sustain the voter rich cities; and how co-dependent we all really are.'

'For Dufferin, I was amazed at the legacy left by the Mega Quarry battle,' says Carl. 'Delegates at the session, and in the hallways afterwards, had the issue very well researched. All are very impressed with the resolve of this community to continue its fight and press for legislative changes to the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA).'

Carl says he was happy to be 'able to tell them that new legislation should be brought forward in the this year's fall session to the Ontario legislature and that we continue to press for substantive changes so that planning around resource extraction will prohibit a repeat of such an exploitive application as the Mega Quarry proposal anywhere in Ontario.'

'Researched worldwide,' Carl conveyed, 'it seems, many questions were asked about the current state of the land - issues around international trade agreements and their impact on this 'Ontario rural' issue, such as: Was there ever a threat by the Highland Companies, or its US based financial backer Baupost, to litigate this community's opposition to their development plans to the international trade tribunal? Are there legislative tools to protect such high value food lands from rezoning? Are Ontarians worried

about food security, how their food is grown and are standards/regulatory framework in nations we import from the same as here?
Do people talk about human right to safe water??

?Far ranging discussions and delegates were very well versed,? adds Mr. Cosack. ?Since attendees not only included international guests, but also policy makers and planners from Ontario, it was a very worthwhile endeavour in which to participate. It is not only Ontarians who are demanding a clear guideline on protection for life's essential farmland and water resources - to most of the developed world it indeed seems be a no brainer.?