

ARA response favourable but NDACT not relaxing

North Dufferin Agriculture and Community Taskforce (NDACT) is seeing a glimmer of hope in the government's response to the 27 recommendations of the Standing Committee on General Government's 2013 review of the Aggregate Resources Act.

The response was issued last Thursday, Feb. 20, by Natural Resources Minister David Oraziotti.

Although NDACT had been disappointed when the recommendations were released in December because there had been no specific reference to protecting prime farmland, spokesman John Decrombrugge said that "despite excellent recommendations made by several agricultural stakeholders, the ARA report contained no protection for prime farmland or source water regions. Instead, it focused on the sketchy scenario of rehabilitating pits and quarries to farmland."

Now, however, he takes heart from one paragraph in the response which states, "On the matter of aggregate extraction on prime agricultural lands, the government believes that there may be

a need to go beyond the Committee's recommendations to address concerns expressed by some of our agricultural stakeholders and through various public interest groups, about the need to better protect farmland," the response states in part.

"Thanks to your letters and e-mails, it appears the government is paying attention. We're getting closer to creating a lasting legacy for our province and future generations. Like the Canadian women's hockey team, we never give up," Mr. Decrombrugge said in an email.

The government's response notes, however, that it is caught in a balancing act between the two vital needs of agricultural land and aggregates. It acknowledges that "Ontario's farmland is a finite, nonrenewable resource and its long-term protection is important to the government, while saying that the government is "striving to achieve a balance that meets our need for aggregate resources while protecting other key assets like water, natural and cultural heritage and agricultural resources."

The minister states that the government supports increased recycling of aggregates.

In the meantime, NDACT is not sitting back and twiddling thumbs in the hopes that Classes 1, 2 and 3 soils will be protected by outcome of the review and the response.

Instead, it is proceeding apace with its Food and Water First campaign and has garnered numerous partnerships, including a number of municipal councils, Toronto included, and the Land Over Landings anti-Pickering Airport group, among others.

In Toronto on March 26 at 7 p.m., Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre and Fairlawn United Church are holding a Food and Water First event called Fairlawn Stock "to learn more about the initiatives to protect prime Ontario farmland."

This Toronto venue will feature Carl Cosack and Donna Tranquada as guest speakers. Those in attendance will be treated to soup from the Fairlawn Soup Ministry along with coffee from the Aroma Espresso Bar and "sweet treats."

Tickets to the event will be \$5 a person or \$10 for a family.

By Wes Keller