

A Permanent Boundary for Farmland

**CFFO¹ Submission to the
Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal**

**Re:
Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe
Places to Grow Discussion Paper**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A number of this year's provincial discussion papers have encouraged us to think that planning for the business of farming will have a brighter future: Greenbelt Task Force Discussion Paper, Planning Act Reform and Implementation Tools, Ontario Municipal Board Reform, Provincial Policy Statement Draft Policies and Growing Strong Rural Communities Consultation Paper.
- 1.2 The Places to Grow discussion paper has a very different flavour. The vision of this document may slow down urban encroachment onto our best farmland but, in the long-run, agriculture will be pushed off of much of our prime land.

2 No Permanent Boundary on Farmland

- 2.1 The cities that are already booming, have been designated priority urban centres and worthy of the new approach to growth in Ontario. Almost without exception these cities are surrounded by some of our best farmland.
- 2.2 Maps in the discussion paper show almost all the land between the Greater Toronto Area and the Niagara Escarpment and between the Greater Toronto Area and the Oak Ridges Moraine as future growth areas. (See the peach fuzz colour on Maps 4, 5 and 6) there is no indication of a plan to break the pattern of urban centres sprawling onto farmland.
- 2.3 Almost all of Ontario's cities started out as farming communities natural consequence of farmers taking nutrients, rain and free energy from the sun and turning them into a stream of new wealth. That

¹ The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario is one of three accredited general farm organizations in Ontario. CFFO has 4,300 family farm entrepreneurs as members and is organized in 22 district associations. Its members farm throughout the province and are involved in a wide range of food production activities. Its Provincial Council brings together 25 to 35 family farm entrepreneurs from across the province for five day-long sessions per year.

guaranteed flow of new wealth enabled the emergence of these dynamic urban centres. That foundation is at risk.

- 2.4 To this day that new wealth is a foundation of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Places to Grow fails to create the permanent boundary for our farmland that is necessary for that stream of new wealth to continue.

3 The Impact of No Permanent Farmland Boundaries on our Cities

- 3.1 The marketplace for land for urban sprawl may be slowed a bit by the new polices proposed for the Greenbelt and the Planning Act but their pattern will not change. In the long-run the market will trounce all efforts to protect farmland. The pattern of development by sprawl will not be broken.
- 3.2 There will be little point in protecting a long sliver of prime agricultural land between the GTA and the Niagara Escarpments and between the GTA and the Oak Ridges Moraine. These lands are not likely to have any “planning for agriculture” policies on them.
- 3.3 Cities will build sewer pipes two or three times bigger than necessary to “accommodate future growth” and thus guarantee that more growth onto farmland is an economic necessity to pay for the infrastructure.
- 3.4 Cities will plan for five-lane roads to “accommodate future growth” and thus guarantee that more growth onto farmland is an economic necessity to pay for the roads.
- 3.5 Speculators will continue to buy up the land in the urban shadow and their lobbying efforts will steadily erode planning policies designed to protect farmland.
- 3.6 The quality of living in our cities is enhanced by the farmland that envelopes them. As long as there is an expectation of sprawl that contribution to quality of life in cities will be mediocre. Farmland, farming communities and green areas will make a much greater contribution to city life if they are permanent.

4 The Impact of No Permanent Farmland Boundaries on Farming

- 4.1 Farmers will not invest in their soil and build its productive capacity. They will likely mine the soil rather than replenish all the nutrients and organic matter consumed by production agriculture.
- 4.2 Farmers will be less likely to invest in modern technology, especially buildings, fixed equipment and perennial crops. When the possibility of selling out to a developer looms on the horizon, there is no point in developing an enterprise with the next generation in mind.
- 4.3 Livestock will fade as it requires higher levels of investment in fixed facilities and equipment. As a result the soil improvement capabilities of manure will be lost to the lands in the urban shadow.
- 4.4 Farm input suppliers and the infrastructure of agriculture will fade because there is no long-term future for the entrepreneurs involved.

Farm entrepreneurs are known for their ingenuity in making up for this loss but it makes farming more expensive.

- 4.5 Farmland close to our cities provides many necessities. It is not a holding zone waiting for something better to come along. It provides fresh food and reduces the health risks that come with the long distance transport of produce. It provides an alternative source to imports and is more environmentally responsible as the energy used for transport is low. Food production supports regional cultural diversity, is key to the management of resources such as water and is a sink for some of the carbon produced in our cities.
- 4.6 Farmers themselves will begin to think more like landowners than farm entrepreneurs. Once that change goes far enough, farmers too will welcome the continuation of urban sprawl and relocate elsewhere, if farming remains a family option.
- 4.7 Absentee landlords and short-term rental agreements are the typical ownership structures of farmland in urban shadow areas where sprawl is expected. These are a recipe for poor environmental stewardship and mining the land of its nutrients.
- 4.8 In urban shadow areas where sprawl is expected land prices soar putting ownership beyond the affordability of family farmers. A concentration of ownership and/or rental results. CFFO's vision for farming is widely distributed ownership and rental as this is the basis of strong environmental stewardship and economic stability.

5 Actions Needed to Establish a Permanent Farmland Boundary

- 5.1 Agree on a map showing the prime agricultural land inside the permanent farmland boundary. Include all specialty cropland. Include all Class I to III agricultural land (Canada Land Inventory). Where necessary include lower classes of land in order to create viable farm parcels (Eastern and Northern Ontario). This designation should not be left up to local municipalities but should be a provincial initiative.
- 5.2 Designate the lands between the farmland boundary and urban boundaries as rural land. There are some areas in Southwestern Ontario that should clearly be included in this rural land designation.
- 5.3 Establish policies that make urban expansion into rural lands relatively easy while expansion into farmland is possible only after municipalities have demonstrated full use of all other growth options (increased densities, redevelopment, brownfield development and use of rural lands).
- 5.4 Changes in the permanent farmland boundary should be allowed only after a public hearing specifically for that purpose. The province should automatically declare a provincial interest in the boundary change.

- 5.5 Establish a farmland infrastructure development charge on any lands taken out of the permanent boundary. This levy should be a significant amount per acre and should be spent to upgrade the infrastructure that sustains and improves the productivity of the remaining farmland. The goal should be to improve rural lands to good quality farmland and no net loss of agricultural productive capacity.

6 Additional Actions in Support of Permanent Farmland Boundary

- 6.1 Ontario needs to abandon the language of protecting farming, villages and towns. Ontario needs an image of planning for them and developing the countryside as a vibrant place to live, visit and do business.
- 6.2 Existing high growth areas should not be designated as the future high growth areas (priority urban areas) just because they are already high growth areas. Designated high growth areas should be linked to a city's ability to grow without increasing its physical footprint. A city's history of growth by increasing density, shortening travel distance to the average job and brownfield redevelopment should put them at the top of the list for support. We support provincial funding for brownfield redevelopment.
- 6.3 Municipalities should not be allowed to expand housing if no new jobs are being created in their communities. Compact urban form needs to include a balance of jobs and housing. The required ratio should be a minimum of one job per household. Even if this ratio is being met, the need to redevelop and increase population and job densities must come before urban boundary expansion.
- 6.4 More growth should be accommodated through brownfield redevelopment and higher densities. For the next 25 years, all communities should be required to accomplish 75% of their growth in jobs and housing by redevelopment, brownfield development and density increases.
- 6.5 The conservation easements on the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve should be turned over to a not-for-profit and non-political entity such as the Ontario Farmland Trust. The current holder of the easement, the Town of Pickering, is subject to political pressure from sprawl proponents.

*Adopted September 22, 2004
Provincial Council
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario*

Places to Grow Discussion Paper can be found at:
http://www.cmatemp.fin.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/cma_4_35657_1.html