



*Long-Term Thinking  
for Today's Issues*

## **Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario**

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### **The Impact of the Places to Grow Act and the Greenbelt on Farmland A CFFO Position Statement**

#### **Preamble**

The green belt legislation that surrounds the Greater Toronto Area, and the Places to Grow Act that targets areas within the Greater Golden Horseshoe for growth, have combined to create additional pressures for urban expansion to occur on prime agricultural land. This statement concerns itself primarily with the Greater Golden Horseshoe, but the arguments apply to all near-urban areas that are facing pressure to expand.

#### **Principles**

- 1.) The CFFO has a long-standing history of supporting very limited severance of prime agricultural land.
- 2.) Market forces simply will not resolve the issue of farm land being swallowed by urban development. There are two economic forces at work that perpetuate this situation.
  - a. The first is that the value of goods that can be extracted from agricultural land compared to the sale value of the same land to urban developers in near urban areas will not favour agricultural production in the foreseeable future.
  - b. Second, urban development will continue to expand outward as long as it is cheaper to expand horizontally than it is to build vertically or redevelop internally.

Therefore, the other steps must be taken, including the introduction of legislation that protects agricultural land from urban development.

- 3.) There is a finite amount of prime agricultural land in Ontario. It is in the public interest to maintain this land because it serves the objective of food security, environmental preservation and the economic viability of a key sector of the economy.
- 4.) It is in the interest of locally-focused food supply chains to maintain the most productive near-urban agricultural land.
- 5.) It is in the interest of globally focused agriculture because the preservation of our prime agricultural land provides for the best comparative advantage in the international arena.
- 6.) From the perspective of the public purse, in the long term, preserving the prime agriculture land for agriculture increases the agriculture sector's ability to be economically viable. This provides the potential for the long term reduction of agricultural subsidies because the foundation of agriculture – the land – is as strong at it can be.

- 7.) The CFFO desires absolute protection of the most productive farm land, but balances that stance by being willing to consider development opportunities on secondary land, under appropriate circumstances.
- 8.) Agriculture has the potential to serve as the best environmental caretaker of prime agricultural land.

### **Concerns**

- 1.) The preservation of class one and two agricultural land is being threatened in near urban areas.
- 2.) When the greenbelt was established the CFFO expressed a number of concerns about the consequences that it would have on unprotected land that lay outside the greenbelt. We believed that development would leapfrog the greenbelt, and farmland would be subsumed by development pressures, and that process has now begun.
- 3.) Existing agricultural land that is annexed into a city may be faced with higher taxation without receiving the same services and benefits as property holders that are part of the fully urban areas.

### **Recommendations**

- 1.) That it is in the public interest that all class one and two agricultural land in Ontario be protected from urban development. The province of British Columbia has had similar regulations in effect for many years. The province of Ontario needs to create a similar plan.
- 2.) Urban development should focus its energies on the redevelopment of brownfields and greyfields within existing borders rather than outwards into agricultural land. In the case of brownfield redevelopment, governments need to provide assurances to developers that protect liability concerns surrounding the environmental assessment and cleanup of these areas.
- 3.) Firm land use designations in the Provincial Policy Statement need to be crafted to distinctly separate urban and agricultural land and their uses.
- 4.) Protecting agricultural land is not enough by itself. The provincial government needs to invest in the development of locally-based food chains. This will help develop local market opportunities for farmer's in near urban areas to develop high value connections with the consumer.

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