

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RESEARCH PROJECT DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES
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PROTECTING SOUTHERN ONTARIO'S FARMLAND

Challenges and Opportunities

MELISSA WATKINS
STEWART HILTS
EMILY BROCKIE



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THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH FARMLAND PRESERVATION RESEARCH PROJECT
IS DIRECTED BY:

Dr. Stewart G. Hilts, Department of Land Resource Science and the School of
Environmental Design and Rural Development

Dr. Wayne Caldwell, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development

CENTRE FOR LAND AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

University of Guelph

Richards Building

Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1

(519) 824-4120

www.uoguelph.ca/~claws

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Executive Summary

Southern Ontario's limited supply of agricultural land is going out of production at an alarming rate. While there is currently no regular inventory of the area of farmland that is being permanently converted to non-agricultural uses, a recent study indicates that over 2000 farms and 150,000 acres of farmland in the Greater Toronto Area alone went out of production in the two decades between 1976 and 1996 (Walton and Hunter Planning and Associates *et al.*, 1999).

Currently the protection of Ontario's agricultural land is not legislated. Rather, it is treated as any other land area in the land use planning process. However, agricultural land may be more appropriately thought of as a valuable and limited natural resource that should be managed and protected as we manage other natural resources.

The loss of farmland is typically attributed to the conversion of the land from agricultural to non-agricultural uses, which usually results from development that permanently changes the use of the land. The major threats to Ontario's farmland can be summarized as:

- Urban Sprawl
- Severances

Who should be concerned with the loss of farmland in Ontario? Everybody. Every person who eats should be concerned with achieving the long-term sustainability of our food systems, which means the protection of Ontario's farmland. The stakeholders in the foodland problem can be further grouped to include:

- The Public
- Farmers
- Farm Organizations: A number of organizations represent the collective views of most farmers and provide input to planners and decision makers on issues from policy and legislation to programs that affect the agricultural industry.
- Environmental and Conservation Non-Government Organizations: Have varying concerns about the protection of agricultural land from the preservation of cultural heritage to protecting ecological features of the landscape.
- Upper and Lower Tier Governments (federal, provincial, regional, and municipal governments): Includes professional planners who provide guidance and advice on land use planning decisions to the authorities who make the decisions.
- Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs: Provides advice and technical assistance to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on planning matters pertaining to agriculture.
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing: The official provincial voice on land use planning matters.
- Ontario Municipal Board: Independent administrative tribunal that hears appeals on contentious municipal matters, including land use planning decisions.

Currently, there are several tools (or combinations of tools) that are being used to protect southern Ontario's farmland; these include:

- Land Stewardship Programs
- Municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws
- Agricultural Easements
- Land Trusts or other Non-Governmental Conservation Organizations
- Income Tax and Property Tax Incentives
- Provincial Policy, Guidelines, Regulations and Legislation

Just because these tools are being used or their use is facilitated under the current land use planning system in Ontario does not necessarily mean that they are being used to their full potential or that they are successful at achieving the long-term protection of farmland.

Other approaches to farmland protection that have had some success in other parts of Canada include the legislated approaches of the provinces of British Columbia and Quebec, which have formed independent commissions dedicated to the protection of farmland and have developed legislation that supports this protection. Other areas have private, community directed initiatives such as land trusts, which have proven successful in contributing to the solutions to the loss of farmland. The Southern Alberta Land Trust Society and the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust are two examples of land trusts that work to protect agricultural land and wildlife habitat.

It is recommended that the stakeholders in Ontario's farmland problem investigate the options for the protection of farmland further and propose next steps for action that will help resolve the problem. Stakeholders and decision makers should consider whether efforts would be better directed into private initiatives, such as establishing a farmland trust to protect farmland, or directed at lobbying government for the public protection of this important dwindling natural resource.

Introduction

Only 5% of Canada's total land base is classified as prime agricultural land (Class 1 to 3 according to the Canada Land Inventory) (Oliver, 1999). Ontario has just over one half (51%) of all of Canada's Class 1 farmland (Green Ontario, 2002). Between 1981 and 1986, prime agricultural land accounted for 59% of all land in Canada converted to urban uses. In 1996, 19% of the Class 1 agricultural land in Canada was occupied by urban development (Statistics Canada, 2002). Each year, Canadian urban centers cumulatively consume a land area equal to the size of Hamilton, Ontario (Oliver, 1999). Ontario is losing its most productive farmland at an alarming rate. While there is currently no effort to inventory or track the loss of agricultural land in Ontario, a recent study commissioned by the Greater Toronto Area Federations of Agriculture Project Management Committee indicated that between 1976 and 1996, over 2000 (30%) farms and over 150,000 acres of farmland went out of production in the GTA alone (Walton and Hunter Planning Associates *et al.*, 1999). The Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society (PALS) reports that over 1.5 million hectares of agricultural lands have been lost to non-agricultural uses in Ontario since 1966 (Preservation Agricultural Lands Society, 2002).

Currently, Ontario does not have legislation specifically designed to protect foodland. Foodland preservation is primarily a function of the land use planning process (and, in a legal sense, governed by the *Planning Act, RSO, 1990, c. P-13*). Land use planning in Ontario is intended to manage growth in a way that weighs social, environmental, and economic concerns while balancing "the interests of individual property owners with the wider interests and objectives of the community" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1999). However, 'good planning', the kind that leads to sustainable, effective, and efficient growth and land management while taking into account all of the competing interests, is often not reached despite best intentions. The fact that prime agricultural land is being lost at an alarming rate to other land uses indicates that the planning process may not be entirely successful at protecting foodland. This may be due to increasing pressures felt by decision makers to consider more lucrative land uses such as residential development in urban-rural fringe areas.

Foodland protection is always contemplated in the context of competing land uses, and these alternative uses usually have economic value attached. Although the province has expressly stated that agricultural protection is a broader interest at stake and it has taken some measures to ensure foodland preservation, the rationale for allowing development or other land uses over agricultural protection does prevail in many cases. Why does this happen so easily? The answer mainly lies in the larger societal attitudes and values around agriculture, development, and economic forces, but more specifically lies within the legal framework and policy context of Ontario's land use planning system.

This purpose of this paper is to provide background information on the problem and the issues surrounding the loss of farmland in southern Ontario and to present some of the possible options (within the realms of both the public and private sectors) that may be considered in efforts to address the issues and resolve the problem. The paper lists the

tools that are currently available to protect farmland in Ontario and briefly reviews other government and non-government approaches to protecting farmland in other areas of Canada. The paper does not make recommendations for legislative reform or propose private initiatives for the protection of Ontario's farmland. Rather, it raises the questions and that stakeholders and decision makers should consider in evaluating the options for farmland protection and forging solutions to achieve a sustainable agricultural industry in Ontario.

The Problem: Threats to Southern Ontario's Farmland

Ontario's burgeoning urban population and corresponding urban sprawl is one reason for the loss of farmland in Ontario. The evolution of land use planning in urban and suburban communities in southern Ontario has created huge demand for developable land on the urban fringe. Unfortunately, much of Ontario's prime agricultural land lies in this urban fringe because, historically, our most prosperous cities were built around the success of the agricultural community. Flat, cleared, agricultural land is not only easily developed, due to dwindling profits in the agricultural industry, it is also very affordable to developers who are seeking to meet the demand for land to accommodate urban growth. It is often far more profitable in the long term for a farmer to sell his or her land, knowing that it may be converted to some non-agricultural land use, than to continue farming the land.

Another important contributor to the loss of southern Ontario's farmland are the thousands of relatively tiny parcels of farmland that are being severed to accommodate growth and residential development in the near urban and rural areas. In isolation, these relatively small severances may not appear to contribute significantly to the loss of farmland in Ontario; however, collectively these severances may contribute to the loss hundreds or thousands of acres of productive agricultural land per year. The current provincial policies on agriculture permit these severances (under limited conditions).

The primary threats to the loss southern Ontario's farmland can be summarized as:

- Urban Sprawl
- Severances

Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities: Who should be Concerned with the Loss of Farmland in Ontario?

Planners, municipalities, the agricultural community, environmental groups, and the provincial government all play important roles in the land use planning process, and in effect, whether farmland protection is achieved.

From a 'front line' perspective, the true planning decisions are made at the local municipal level. The authority for municipalities to plan for their communities has been delegated by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in Section 4 of the *Planning Act*. Municipalities develop an Official Plan, which "sets out the municipality's general planning goals and policies that will guide future land use" and implements its Official Plan by enacting zoning by-laws, which are "rules and regulations that control development as it occurs" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2002). The ability to create by-laws is a power given to municipalities under Section 34 of the *Planning Act*.

Planners, who are hired professionals of the municipality or upper tier government, make recommendations to council about what planning decisions should be made. This makes planning quite a political process where elected officials hold a substantial amount of power. Of course, planning decisions must remain within the bounds of the *Planning Act* and the province's guiding policies (*i.e.*, the Provincial Policy Statement) or planning authority may be taken away from the local authority (under Section 4(5) of the *Planning Act*).

The province also plays a key role in directing how land use planning is carried out by developing provincial policy on issues such as the protection of agricultural land and by delivering the One Window Planning Service through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Currently the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) is responsible for the one-window approach by carrying out "provincial input, review and approval of planning applications...with input from other ministries, as required" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1999).

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), which is involved in matters pertaining to agriculture and foodland protection, provides technical advice to MMAH, municipalities, and citizens on agricultural policies and other related guidelines (such as the Minimum Distance Separation requirements) as well as general advice about the potential impacts of various planning decisions on agricultural operations and practices (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2002). OMAFRA used to be involved in site-specific proposals (*e.g.*, land severances) but is now in more of an advisory role on policy related issues.

One other key stakeholder represented at the provincial level is the Ontario Municipal Board, or OMB. The OMB is "an independent administrative tribunal responsible for hearing appeals and deciding on a variety of contentious municipal matters" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2002). The OMB operates under the *Ontario Municipal*

Board Act, reports to MMAH, and is somewhat similar to a court of law, though less formal. The OMB provides an opportunity for citizens and municipalities to appeal planning decisions in a public forum where disputes over matters such as provincial interests and community interests have occurred. An OMB case is usually the last resort in settling planning conflicts after alternative dispute resolution and other means of satisfying differences have been exhausted. In the past the OMB has gained a reputation for favoring the side of development, where economic interests and benefits outweigh other social and environmental considerations.

Other important players in foodland protection are farm and environmental groups. The roles that these groups play are varied, but the well-established and politically recognized groups (such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture) are usually involved in providing input into policy-making processes (e.g., the five-year review of the Provincial Policy Statement) when they are invited to do so by the government. They may also be involved in lobbying the government for a variety of reasons, from farm subsidies to wetland protection. Each of these special interest groups has their own priorities and consequently their own perspectives on foodland protection. Environmental groups may be concerned with protecting prime agricultural land for its natural values while some farm groups may want to preserve agriculture as a lifestyle. Though these groups are an important voice in the planning cycle they can be quite segregated from one another in their values and positions.

These stakeholders, from the local to the provincial level, all come together to affect land use planning decisions around farmland, which may have important long-term effects on every resident of Ontario who participates in our food systems, whether their role is producer or consumer. Sometimes planning decisions work in favor of preservation, but in light of Ontario's growing population, rapid urbanization and decrease in farming as an occupation overall, foodland protection has not been overly successful.

In summary, the issue of foodland protection affects every person in Ontario to some extent. The key stakeholders in the problem can be grouped as follows:

- The Public
- Farmers
- Farm Organizations
- Environmental and Conservation Non-Government Organizations
- Upper and Lower Tier Governments (federal, provincial, regional, and municipal governments)
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Municipal and Provincial Planning Professionals
- Ontario Municipal Board

What can be done to Protect Farmland Under the Current Framework in Ontario?

Currently, there are several tools (or combinations of tools) that are being used to protect southern Ontario's farmland; these include:

- Land Stewardship Programs
- Municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws
- Agricultural Easements
- Land Trusts or other Non-Governmental Conservation Organizations
- Income Tax and Property Tax Incentives
- Provincial Policy, Guidelines, Regulations and Legislation

(Adapted from Peterson, 2000,
Alternative Tools for Protection of the GTA Countryside)

Land Stewardship Programs

Because farmland is held in private ownership in Ontario, stewardship is important to maintaining the quality of existing farmland, which can have an important influence on whether the land will be protected for farming in the future. Farmland that is poorly managed may lose productivity and therefore be subject to alternative land uses.

Land stewardship programs can be an effective way to raise awareness and support for the protection of agricultural land throughout Ontario. The conservation authorities; the Ministry of Natural Resources stewardship coordinators; and the agricultural organizations, such as the Federation of Agriculture, are the principal agencies currently delivering these types of programs in southern Ontario. Other non-government organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the Centre for Land and Water Stewardship at the University of Guelph are also involved in promoting and delivering stewardship programs that help to protect farmland (Peterson, 2000).

Improved stewardship programs are one option that may be used to protect foodland in Ontario. However, these programs usually rely on the voluntary cooperation of the landowner, which is an approach that has historically been supported by the farm community, but risks being ineffective if widespread cooperation cannot be achieved. This approach is relatively easy to implement, although it is fairly reliant on staff time to deliver the program to landowners. Although this approach has the potential to build relationships between landowners and the government and may contribute to achieving improved understanding and attitudes towards foodland protection, it has low potential to achieve widespread results that would permanently protect farmland.

Municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws

Where there is political will and community support official plans and zoning by-laws have the potential to protect foodland. For example, "permanent agricultural reserves" could be designated to protect high quality farmlands and viable farm communities that

should be the last lands considered for urban expansion. The *Planning Act* gives the official plans and zoning by-laws of municipal governments the force and effect of statute (Peterson, 2000).

In addition to the fact that landowners and municipal staff are familiar with agricultural zoning and it can provide a degree of foodland protection at a relatively low administrative cost, agricultural zoning is flexible and can be adapted to accommodate local circumstances. (Peterson, 2000).

The unfortunate reality, however, is that market demand is usually stronger than political will and community support and foodland is rarely adequately protected using these planning tools. It is unlikely that improving the use of these existing tools will be adequate to protect foodland in the long-term because local development pressures will always prevail over the problem of the loss of farmland.

Agricultural Easements

Easements, also known as covenants or servitudes, are legal agreements that place restrictions on the acceptable uses that are permitted on a property and are tied to the title of a property in perpetuity. The land remains in private ownership, subject to the restrictions of the easement. An easement on private land is held (and monitored) by another body in the long-term. Agricultural easements are a tool that could be used by land trusts or government to protect foodland in the long-term. The use of conservation easements are currently enabled under the *Conservation Land Act, RSO 1990, c.28*, however, this legislation was designed to protect natural and ecologically significant areas and is not entirely applicable to farmland. There was a very short-lived easement program, the Niagara Tender Fruits Program, for protecting specialty cropland in the Niagara region in the early 90's; however, it was dropped with the election of new provincial government.

There is some question about whether the *Ontario Heritage Act* could have the potential to protect foodland as an important cultural heritage feature on Ontario's landscape. Generally, industrial landscapes are not protected by the Act, however, agriculture plays an important role in Ontario's cultural history and the Act may be amended to accommodate this.

The *Ontario Agricultural Institute Act* enables the institute to hold easements for the protection of agricultural land, although this practice is not often exercised.

An amendment to regulations in the *Canada Income Tax Act* may also be in order to recognize the donation of easements by private landowners on agricultural land, not just ecologically sensitive land as the Act currently allows.

The use of easements to protect foodland has extremely high potential to be effective to ensure a long-term supply of farmland in Ontario. The Southern Alberta Land Trust

Society and the American Farmland Trust in the States have established extremely successful easement programs that have earned the support of government and the farming community alike. An easement program would be relatively inexpensive to establish and could be highly effective in the long-term because the easements are not subject to review through the planning process. It would require the commitment of groups such as land trusts to hold and monitor the easements in the long-term. Lower-tier governments may oppose the use of easements in some instances because they override existing zoning designations and effectively revoke the municipality's power to determine the permitted use on that property. Currently, easements are the only tools available that have high potential to keep foodland protected in the long-term, however, in order for easements to be used effectively province-wide, there needs to be some legislative reform to enable their use to protect foodland.

Land Trusts

Land trusts are non-government organizations that protect land through ownership or other formal legal agreements (Hilts and Reid, 1993). The general goal of a land trust is to protect private land for public benefit, which is often achieved through the acquisition and long-term management of the land, or by placing easements on the land that permanently restrict the land use of the property (Watkins and Hilts, 2001). Although there are currently no land trusts in Ontario that are exclusively dedicated to protecting agricultural land, land trusts have been used to protect farmland throughout the United States and western Canada for many years.

The federal Legacy 2000 program and the provincial Community Conservancy Program are two examples of the limited government funding that is currently available to Ontario land trusts to protect farmland (Peterson, 2000).

An Ontario farmland trust could perform any number of functions to protect foodland, from education and government lobbying in support of foodland preservation to acquiring farmland and leasing it back to farmers at affordable rates. The latter function may be one way to make farmland more affordable to farmers.

Income Tax and Property Tax Incentives

Currently in Ontario, qualifying farmland is eligible to benefit from favorable assessment values and property taxation that is at 25% of the residential tax rate established by the local municipality.

Donations of land or easements to government or qualified conservation organizations can qualify for a charitable tax receipt or for a corresponding reduction in the income tax otherwise payable by the landowner, respectively. Unfortunately, the donors may also be subject to capital gains taxation on the accrued increase in the value of the land (Peterson, 2000). Currently, the tax benefits of donating land are only applicable to

ecologically sensitive lands and there is some question about how these rules could be applied to the donation of agricultural land or easements.

Provincial Policy, Guidelines, Regulations and Legislation

The Planning Act

Although there is no provincial legislation specifically designed for the protection of agricultural land, certain elements of the *Planning Act* may be used to protect farmland. First, the Act gives municipalities the authority to make planning decisions about farmland protection through their official plans and zoning by-laws. The Act also states that: “The Minister, the council, a planning board and the Municipal Board, in carrying out their responsibilities under this Act, ‘shall have regard to’, among other matters, matters of provincial interest such as...the protection of the agricultural resources of the Province...”. Agriculture is one item of provincial interest identified in the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS). A municipality is legally bound to ‘have regard’ to all matters of interest in the PPS, which in many cases have the potential to conflict with one another.

The phrase, ‘have regard to’, has created much contention amongst decision makers and interest groups who interpret its meaning in various ways. For example, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture prefers the term ‘shall have regard to’ as opposed to the former ‘shall be consistent with’ because it states less strongly that municipalities should conform with provincially driven policies, and gives more discretionary power to the local governments who understand their rural areas better than the province could (Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 1998). On the other hand, the Christian Farmer’s Federation of Ontario (CFFO) abhors the phrase ‘shall have regard to’ because it leaves too much room for debate around what the standard of compliance should be (and how low the standard could be given the vagueness of it). In addition, it does not prioritize provincial interests so that economic benefits have to potential to consistently outweigh foodland protection (Christian Farmer’s Federation of Ontario, 2002, 1).

Provincial Policy Statement

Section 2.1 of the Provincial Policy Statement on “Agricultural Policies” is the most pertinent to foodland protection. This section covers aspects of planning around agricultural land such as lot creation, non-agricultural uses, agricultural protection, normal farm practices, and minimum distance separation formulae. Over the years provincial policy statements have evolved into a concise, short document with little mention of how the policies are to be implemented. In the past the implementation guidelines were established to direct the planning process in a detailed way. Since then the implementation guidelines have gone to the wayside and the PPS is left primarily to interpretation. This has been without a doubt the most challenging feature of the PPS in terms of achieving foodland protection.

The PPS makes it clear that agricultural protection is an essential matter of public and provincial interest in section 2.1.1 where it states, “*Prime agricultural areas will be protected for agriculture. Permitted uses and activities in these areas are: agricultural uses, secondary uses, and agriculture-related issues. Proposed new secondary uses and agriculture-related uses will be compatible with, and will not hinder, surrounding*

agricultural operations.” Where the PPS becomes less clear, is in statements such as “lot creation in prime agricultural areas is generally discouraged...”(S. 2.1.2) and “An area may be excluded from prime agricultural areas only for limited non-residential uses, provided that there is a demonstrated need for additional land to be designated to accommodate the proposed use...” (Section 2.1.3 c) 3). How does one know what ‘generally discouraged’ means or what constitutes ‘demonstrated need’? These terms are ambiguous and may be interpreted differently in different cases.

In addition, the Ontario Provincial Policy Statement (Section 1.1 and Section 2.1) specifically considers the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses and specifies the tests to be applied to the amendment of agricultural designations in municipal official plans (Peterson, 2000).

On the positive side, the PPS does create some ground rules for local planning authorities when it comes to the official plans and by-laws they make, and opens the door for municipalities to go beyond the minimum policies set out in the PPS. For example, the PPS states that farm retirement lot creation may be permitted but some counties, such as the Region of Waterloo, have disallowed retirement lot creation altogether. Placing higher restrictions than suggested by the PPS is in accordance with the overall goal of protecting prime agricultural land as mentioned in Sections 1.1 and 2.1. However, as a legislative tool the PPS is not highly effective in achieving long-term farmland protection due to its lack of implementation guidelines and room for interpretation.

Identifying Agricultural Land: The Canada Land Inventory

The Canada Land Inventory (CLI) is an important tool that is used to determine what is deemed prime agricultural land. Prime agricultural lands are referred to in the PPS and are classified as Classes 1-3 agricultural lands as identified by the CLI are lands that have the greatest soil capability for crop production. Some feel that just because land is not considered to be prime agricultural land does not mean it should be excluded from protection. In addition there are questions around the different criteria that land classes are based on. For example, land may not have the best soil but may have better access to market (e.g., in a northern or remote area) or can support growth of a particular crop. Those lands should be protected as well, or at least mentioned in the PPS (Christian Farmer’s Federation of Ontario, 2002, 6).

Smart Growth

The Ontario government has attempted to approach development in a sustainable way through its Smart Growth plan. Smart Growth is a strategy for well-managed growth that seeks to accommodate the various sectors in a way that meets common goals for the province. Its three main goals are to sustain a strong economy, build strong communities, and promote a healthy environment (Ontario Smart Growth, 2002). While Smart Growth remains a positive and forward thinking approach to development that

takes into account land use decisions and their impacts on farmland, it is too soon to evaluate the potential efficacy of the approach.

How is Foodland Protected in Other Areas of Canada?

Legislated Approaches

British Columbia Agricultural Land Reserve

The province of British Columbia established an Agricultural Land Reserve under the Land Reserve Commission over 25 years ago and has been extremely successful in slowing the rate of the loss of farmland in that province. Since 1973, the Commission has succeeded in reducing the loss of farmland from 6,000 hectares per year to less than 500 hectares per year today. The Agricultural Land Reserve is legislated under the *Agricultural Land Reserve Act, RSBC 1996, c. 10*, which requires the preparation of land reserve plans to identify and protect the best quality agricultural land (British Columbia Land Reserve Commission, 2002).

An agricultural land commission for Ontario would require enabling legislation for the commission and an agricultural land reserve to be formed at the provincial level. Like the Niagara Escarpment Commission that works to govern land use for the protection of the Escarpment, an agricultural land commission could require special development permits for all development on prime agricultural land in the province. The commission could also establish regional plans for the protection of prime agricultural land under the *Ontario Planning and Development Act*. Based on the success of the British Columbia Agricultural Land Reserve, it is reasonable to expect that this approach could also be effective in Ontario. Establishing a commission provides a relatively inexpensive, effective approach to protect foodland in the long-term that would likely be accepted by all stakeholders.

Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec (Agricultural Land Protection Commission of Quebec)

The province of Québec established commission similar to the British Columbia Agricultural Land Reserve Commission for the protection of agricultural land in 1978, which is empowered under the *Loi sur la protection du territoire et des activités agricoles, LRQ, CP-41.1* that was revised in 1996, and most recently in 2001 (Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec, 2002). The commission also relies on the *Loi sur l'aménagement et l'urbanisme, LRQ, CP A-19.1*, which is the equivalent of Ontario's *Planning Act*, to make planning decisions that protect farmland. The mission of the Quebec commission is to protect agricultural land and agricultural activities, which implies that the government commission also serves the purpose of protecting the right to farm in Quebec.

The model of a government initiated commission that has the legal authority to enforce farmland protection has proven to be at least somewhat effective in other regions of Canada and should be investigated further as an option that may be considered for the protection of Ontario's farmland.

Other Initiatives

Southern Alberta Land Trust Society

The Southern Alberta Land Trust Society (SALTS) is an excellent example of a land trust that protects farmland in Canada. SALTS was established by a group of ranchers in southwestern Alberta in 1997 to address the fragmentation of the landscape, the rapid disappearance of the province's native rangelands, and the loss of open spaces and wildlife habitat. SALTS was incorporated as a non-profit society and was registered federally as a charity in 1998 (Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, 2002).

The organization's approach is to recognize that a long-term solution that sustains land in an ecological sense must also recognize its economic and cultural sustainability. The organization holds conservation easements on two thousand acres of ranchland and wildlife habitat, produces booklets and other educational materials about land conservation, and has worked to establish Canada's first program to integrate land conservation into agricultural estate and succession planning (Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, 2002).

Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust

The Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust (DFWT) is an organization that works to protect farmland and wildlife habitat in the Fraser River Delta, located beside the sprawling city of Vancouver (Agricultural Workforce Policy Board, 2002). The group was established as a partnership between farmers and conservationists and an important role of the group is to educate non-farmers about the environmental benefits of farming. The trust's role in protecting farmland is largely educational; however, they are involved in more active management of agricultural land for the purpose of protecting wildlife habitat.

Summary and Recommendations for Further Investigation

The loss of farmland to non-agricultural uses in southern Ontario is a growing problem that deserves immediate attention so that the steps can be taken to avoid a veritable farmland crisis in the future. There is a finite area of productive agricultural land in Ontario and the wise management of this natural resource is imperative to ensure the viability of the agricultural industry, which is an important component of Ontario's economy and cultural heritage. The problem of the loss of farmland has wide-ranging implications for all residents of Ontario, from individual citizens who are consumers of agricultural products, to farmers who depend on the resource for their livelihood, to upper and lower tier governments who are responsible for the planning decisions that affect the use of agricultural land.

This paper presents various options to achieve farmland protection in Ontario based on the current land use planning framework and the experiences of other areas that have already attempted to address their dwindling farmland problems. These options range from approaches that are legislated at the provincial level to the initiatives of private organizations such as land trusts. It is recommended that the stakeholders concerned with the loss of farmland in southern Ontario investigate these options, as well as new or innovative approaches that may not have been presented here to plan next steps for the protection of Ontario's farmland.

Some important questions that should be considered in evaluating options and forging solutions to this problem include:

- ***What is the actual rate of loss of farmland in Ontario? Who should keep this annual inventory?***
- ***Should prime agricultural land be rendered unaffordable and/or unattainable to developers? How can this be achieved?***
- ***Should we put our money and efforts into private initiatives to protect farmland such as a farmland trust or should this effort be put into lobbying government for the necessary changes to land use planning, provincial policy and legislative reform?***
- ***Could a farmland trust perform both of these functions?***

Of course, this list is not exhaustive and decision makers should measure any option based on its ability to achieve long-term resolution of the problem, its efficiency, and acceptance by stakeholders, among other criteria. Foodland protection is an important, yet challenging problem to resolve and it is time that stakeholders from all backgrounds and disciplines unite to investigate and evaluate the options that will help lead to a sustainable agricultural industry and community for the future of Ontario.

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Contact Information

Melissa Watkins

Research Assistant, Centre for Land and Water Stewardship; and
MSc Candidate, Department of Land Resource Science

Ontario Agricultural College

University of Guelph

Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

(ph) (519) 824-4120 x2686

(fax) (519) 824-5730

email: mwatkins@uoguelph.ca

Dr. Stewart Hilts

Chair, Department of Land Resource Science; and

Director, Centre for Land and Water Stewardship

University of Guelph

Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

(ph) (519) 824-4120 x2447

(fax) (519) 824-5730

email: shilts@uoguelph.ca